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IN THE GOLDEN SHELL



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Feb 7 1873.



Frontispiece.

CICCIO'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

Page 50.

IN STILL LIFE



With the Author's Portrait

LONDON:
MACMILLAN & CO.,
1891.



IN THE GOLDEN SHELL,

A Story of Palermo.

BY LINDA MAZINI.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:
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TO
MY LITTLE ZINA
THESE PAGES
ARE
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IN THE GOLDEN SHELL.

CHAPTER I.

AT SEA.

THE clear, pure light of early dawn was streaming into the deck-cabin of the good steamer "Campidoglio," and a sleeping child in an upper berth began to turn about on her hard mattress, to throw off the coverings, and give other signs that her night's rest was coming to an end. First, one eye opened a tiny bit, to close again immediately, then the other repeated the experiment, then both opened without shutting again for at least three seconds, and finally, after a good deal of winking and blinking, the little girl sat up in her narrow bed, and gazed about her in a bewildered sort of way, for she had been dreaming that she was at home in the villa among the olives, just outside the

B

gates of Florence, and, at first, could not make out where she was.

She had been travelling some time now, and that increased the confusion of her ideas. One peep at the still sea through the small square window opening on to the deck brought her fairly out of dreamland into the beautiful new reality. No! she was neither at home in Florence, nor in an hotel in Rome or Naples, but out on the open sea, the beautiful blue Mediterranean, on her way to Sicily, to stay with Aunt Caroline and her unknown cousins Francesco and Rosalia.

A second peep out of window showed her a scattered group of small rocky islands. What child has not a passion for small islands? How was it possible to remain in bed when wonders like these were visible?

"May I get up, mamma?" she asked, very softly.

There was no answer.

Then bending down over the edge of her berth, so that her curly brown hair tumbled all over her

face, and craning her neck a good deal, at the risk of toppling down on to the floor, little Lina could see that her mother was fast asleep in the lower berth, looking, too, so pale and tired that the child, though but little accustomed to respect others' slumbers when wide-awake herself, had not the courage to repeat her question. What was to be done? It was too hard to have to lie quietly in her narrow bed when there was so much to be seen.

Again she looked out at those dear little islands, all pink and opalescent in the rosy flush of dawn, and that look decided the question. She would DRESS HERSELF for the first time in her life, and run out on deck. This momentous resolution taken, Lina forthwith proceeded to carry it into effect. Not easily, however, for she was an easy-going, careless little girl, at all times too eager to get to play to pay much attention to the order and manner in which her mother's quick fingers put on her clothes; and I am sorry to say that before this particular morning she had had no

proper pride about learning to dress herself. She was the youngest child, you see, and, at all events in her mother's eyes, a baby still. So she sat up in bed and pondered a little, and looked at the neatly-arranged pile at the end of the berth with a considerable amount of perplexity.

"Let me see," she said, jerking her brown mane out of her eyes; "I must fancy I've had my bath, and put on my stockings."

That part of her task was soon satisfactorily accomplished; one was inside out, it is true, but who thinks of trifles like that? Then came desperate struggles with tiresome strings and obstinate buttons, which so confused her mind that she put on her white petticoat underneath her flannel one; but all her clothes were huddled on at last, if in a queer fashion; and the little girl managed to scramble down to the cabin-floor without awakening either her mamma or those two stout old Sicilian ladies who were comfortably snoring in the opposite berth, with their heads tied up in silk handkerchiefs, and their chignons dangling on pegs

like Indian war trophies. In another instant she had slipped through the doorway, and was leaning over the side of the steamer, staring with delighted eyes at the new and lovely prospect before her.

The sea was like a huge lake ; there was not a cloud in the sky. To the east lay the marvellous little islands she had had a glimpse of through her tiny window, and one of them, the most distant, rose up into a rugged peak, from which a faint thread of smoke was issuing. To the left of the group rosy streaks and gleams were spreading upwards from the horizon into the clear sky. The light grew brighter and brighter ; the sea seemed on fire where it met the sky, and swiftly uprose the sun from the illuminated deep. Lina's lips parted with a cry of delight, and she stood looking and laughing for very joy. Children's memories are short, and she did not remember ever having seen the sun rise before.

"What pleases you so much, little meess?" asked a good-natured voice, close behind her, speaking English with a strong Italian accent.

The child started, and quickly turned her bright animated face towards the speaker—a pleasant-looking, sunburnt man, with a big brown beard and a cap with gold lace on it.

“Oh!” she cried, “it is all so beautiful—the sun, the sea, and those darling little islands. I never saw the sun rise before—did you? And please tell me the names of those islands, and where is Mount Etna, and when shall we get to Sicily.”

“How many questions!” exclaimed her new acquaintance, laughing; “but I think I can answer them all. Come up here with me.” And he led the way towards the steps leading to the captain’s bridge.

Lina drew back. “But we mustn’t go up there,” she said. “Mamma told me last night, when we first came on board, that no one was allowed to go there but the officers of the vessel.”

“Well! I am an officer of the vessel; so you see I may take you there.”

Lina danced with delight when she found herself upon the platform.

“How nice this is!” she exclaimed; “I did want



LINA WITH THE CAPTAIN ON THE BRIDGE.

Page 6.

badly to come up here last night, and then when I couldn't I felt cross, and then I began to feel sick and mamma put me to bed, and I went to sleep; and now I am sure I shall never feel sick any more on board this beautiful steamer. Oh! bother my hair!" she exclaimed, as the morning breeze blew her thick mane into her eyes.

"Ah!" said her companion, "little girls should have something on their heads;" and taking a woollen scarf from his pocket he wound it snugly over her head and round her neck and under her chin, and gave her a sounding kiss on her glowing cheek as a finish to the operation.

"How beautiful! how beautiful!" shouted the child, clapping her hands, and jumping about; "we can see everything up here. What lovely mountains!" and she pointed ahead to where in the distance chains beyond chains of shadowy peaks and crags were visible.

"That is Sicily," said her friend, smiling at her enthusiasm. "In a few hours we shall be in sight of Palermo."

"Then Sicily must be like fairyland," she said, in a low voice, looking solemnly up in his face; "don't you think so?"

He shook his head, "I have never been in fairyland. I shouldn't wonder if you know more about it than I do. Tell me what it is like."

Lina was not a bit puzzled for a reply. "Why," she said, "everything in fairyland is a great deal more beautiful than anywhere else; and what *can* be more beautiful than all those mountains?"

"You have quite convinced me," he answered, laughing; "and now that that question is settled, look if you can see that white great slope, high up there to the left, behind and beyond all the other hills."

Lina strained her eyes eastwards in the direction indicated, and soon announced that she could make out something whiter than the clouds.

"Well! that is Mongibello—Mount Etna—my little girl—the biggest mountain in Sicily, and the biggest——"

"The biggest volcano in Europe," put in Lina,

promptly ; "yes, mamma told me about it ; but I don't like it much ; there are no flames."

"It is very quiet just now—not nearly so active as Mount Vesuvius ; but if you look very attentively, I think you will be able to make out a thin curl of smoke.

Lina looked and looked till she saw, or thought she saw, the smoke ; but it was plain that she did not think much of famous Mount Etna, and she soon turned her head in another direction.

"Another island !" she exclaimed, in astonishment, as she saw on the right a long rocky isle with a white fringe of houses at one end, just kissed by the rays of the morning sun.

"That is Ustica," said her friend, "and you will see it better presently ; and now, if you look again at the Lipari Isles you were admiring so much when you first came on deck, I'll show you another volcano ;" and he pointed out Stromboli, which was now well in view.

"I don't think I care much for lazy volcanoes," answered Lina, contemptuously ; "they ought all to

send out lots of smoke and fire and stones every time you look at them, like Vesuvius was doing when we came on board last night. That is something like a mountain; and it was a great shame mamma would not take me up to the top of it. I did so want to go up Vesuvius," she concluded, in an injured voice, as she looked up confidingly in her companion's face.

"You would have found it hard work with those little legs. Stromboli would be easier for you. Do you know that there are stones there as big, nay, bigger, than those bales down in the hold, that you with your little hands could lift up and throw about with the greatest ease, and if you threw one at me it would not hurt me at all?"

Now Lina was too polite to say she did not believe him, but at hearing this statement she stared at her companion with an expression in her widely-opened eyes that plainly showed her incredulity.

He proceeded to explain the mystery by asking her if she had ever seen any pumice-stone.

"Oh yes!" said Lina; "mamma has some in her bedroom at home."

"And did you never notice how light it was?"

"To be sure I have; it is a great big bit, yet it fell on my foot one day without hurting me at all."

"Exactly; so now you'll believe what I told you about Stromboli, for those great stones that I mentioned are masses of pumice."

"What fun it must be rolling them about!" said Lina, merrily. "I wonder if my uncle and aunt at Palermo will ever take me to Stromboli."

By this time there was much bustle and movement on deck, where all had been so quiet and still when Lina first escaped from the cabin. A shuffling of feet and great clanking of chains caused the child to look down below the bridge on which she was standing; and there, huddled together near the yawning gulf of the hold, and close to piles of crates filled with unhappy struggling poultry, she saw a quantity of dirty, evil-looking men, some of whom seemed to her to be dressed in an uncouth sort of uniform, and saw that they were linked

together in couples by a short chain connecting the handcuff on one man's left wrist to that on another's right, while each had a chain from his waist to one of his ankles.

Lina shuddered, and pressed against her companion's side. "Who are those poor horrid men?" she inquired, in a shaking voice. "I don't like them."

"They are galeotti—convicts, you call them in English," he answered; "people who have done wicked things, for which they are being punished by being kept in prison and made to work for the government. These men are going to pass their term of punishment at Palermo."

"What a pity! I hope I shall never see them there; they frighten me, though I am sorry for them."

"I am afraid you will see them often, my dear, for they work on the roads and in the quarries; but you must try not to be frightened, for indeed they could not harm you even if they wished. The king's soldiers take care to guard them well. See,

now they are bringing them their breakfast ;" and Lina, who, in spite of her fear, could not take her eyes off the poor wretches, saw great flat loaves of coarse brown bread being distributed to the prisoners, and huge pans of smoking black coffee—one to every four men—who dipped their bread in it, and devoured it greedily.

She was so much absorbed watching all this, that she gave a start when her companion said, presently :

"Is your name Lina, pray?"

"Of course it is ; but how did you guess it?" said she, much surprised.

"Because some one is calling for Lina, little Lina—listen."

The child heard her mother's voice calling anxiously : "Lina, Lina! where are you? Come here directly."

She turned to go, rather unwillingly, "Good-bye, sir," she said, frankly putting up her face to be kissed. "I like you very much. May I come back when mamma has done with me?"

"Certainly," laughed her friend; "and bring mamma too, if she likes to come; and, though I ought to be very busy, I daresay I shall be able to find time to tell you something more about Sicily."

That promise made Lina quite happy, and she went skipping down the narrow steps, calling out as she went, "I am coming, mamma, I am coming."

CHAPTER II.

PALERMO IS IN SIGHT.

MRS. GERARD was standing at the cabin-door, looking round with a very anxious face for her missing child.

"You have frightened me, my little one," she said, gently, as Lina came dancing towards her. "When I awoke and found no Lina, I almost thought she had fallen into the sea. Now let me see how you have managed to put on your things."

So, drawing her inside the cabin, the lady began to set her child to rights; and Lina, after pressing her happy, glowing face against her mother's pale, tired one, chattered away with that indefatigable little tongue of hers, recounting all the marvels she had seen from the deck, and the kindness of her new friend.

"And then to think, mamma," she went on, "that in a few hours I shall see Aunt Caroline and my Italian cousins : but oh ! I'm afraid I shall not care much for Rosalia. Cousins can't be as nice as sisters. It does seem so hard that poor Emily should be in a nasty school in England instead of coming with us to see all these beautiful new places !"

Her mother sighed. To her also the separation from her other child, her eldest daughter, was very grievous ; and she paused an instant from her task of brushing little Lina's brown curls into something approaching smoothness.

"Yet it is best so, my child," she said, softly. "Your sister is a big girl now ; and at her age it is better for her to keep to her studies than to waste her time travelling about ; and, as you know, dear, I am too poor to refuse your Uncle George's offer of paying for her education."

"Why didn't he put me to school too, then, mamma ? it wasn't kind of him to separate us," pouted Lina.

"He would have done so, dear ; but what should

I do without you both? You are so young still, for all that you are so proud of being eight years old, that I can go on teaching you for some time to come. Is my little girl in such a hurry to leave her mother?"

Lina's warm, clinging arms were round her mother's neck in an instant.

"Darling mamma! I didn't mean what I said; but it would be nicer to be all together, wouldn't it? Why didn't that grumpy Uncle George ask us to come and live with him, as he is so rich, and you say you can't afford to live in England?"

"Your uncle knows best, dear," answered Mrs. Gerard, slowly. She did not choose to tell her little girl that Uncle George was more desirous of befriending his brother's children than his brother's widow, whom he knew little of, and was prejudiced against on account of what he was pleased to call "her foreign bringing up." In fact, Mrs. Gerard, though of English birth, had lived nearly all her life in Florence, and it was there that Captain Gerard had known and married her, much to the

disgust of his family, who had looked forward to his making a grand marriage in England, and were mortally offended at his having preferred a half-foreign girl with no money, and not a single aristocratic connection. She had been some years a widow now, and it was only since the failure of an Indian bank, in which part of her slender capital was placed, that rich Uncle George, her husband's bachelor brother, had come forward with the offer of educating one or both of her children on the condition of having unlimited control over them when once committed to his charge. At first poor Mrs. Gerard would have indignantly declined the offer ; but after long reflection, much calculation of ways and means, and many bitter tears, she had decided that she ought to accept the offer for at least one of her little girls, and that her clever, brilliant Emily, then eleven years, ought to be the one to profit by the proposed advantages. To part with both was out of the question.

So now, for nearly a year, Emily had been in England, and her cheerful letters, full of details of

her new life, and of Uncle George's kindness, were all the widow and little Lina had to fill the void occasioned by her absence. It was chiefly in the hope of being able to save up enough money to cover the expenses of a visit to England that Mrs. Gerard had now let her tiny villa near Florence, where all the happiest years of her short married life had been passed, and accepted the pressing invitation of her only sister, long married and settled in Sicily, to come and pass the winter with them at Palermo. But this journey was a great undertaking for the poor lady, who already half repented the step she had taken, although she felt that her Lina was perhaps a wee bit spoilt, and would be all the better for the companionship of her cousins.

Naturally, Lina herself was untroubled by any misgivings. Everything was a delight to her, only she had quite made up her mind that she could never like a cousin half as well as her own sister, that, in fact, it would be wrong to do so.

Before she had told her mother all about the

sunrise and the wonderful islands, and before half the tangles of her hair had been combed out, the bell summoned them to breakfast below, and Lina discovered, much to her delight, that her friend was the captain of the steamboat, and that he had kept a place for her by his side.

So the child laughed, and chatted, and ate her breakfast with a vigorous appetite, that, in spite of the smoothness of the sea, excited the envious astonishment of many of the passengers; and pale Mrs. Gerard brightened up a little on finding that the good-natured captain knew her sister and her sister's husband very well.

"Mind you come to see us whenever you are at Palermo," exclaimed Lina, "and"—very coaxingly—"couldn't you take us all in your steamer to Stromboli?"

The captain burst out laughing, and shook his head.

"I am afraid the owners might object," he said; then, seeing Lina's puzzled, disappointed look, he added: "You know the boat is not mine; I am

only the captain ; but I promise to come and see you sometimes at Palermo."

"Then, doesn't this steamer ever go to Stromboli?" asked Lina, returning to the charge.

"No ; it is not on our line ; we go to Palermo and Messina, Catania and Syracuse, sometimes even to Malta, but never to those little islands that have bewitched you."

Breakfast over, Lina was soon scampering about on deck again, asking questions of all the sailors she could beguile into a moment's conversation, and making friends with several of the passengers who were attracted by the bright, eager little maiden.

Mrs. Gerard, comfortably seated up aloft on the bridge, sat basking in the sweet morning sunshine, feeling younger and more hopeful than she had felt for years as she gazed at the grand and varied outlines of the mountain land they were approaching. These outlines, that had been so vague and vaporous and dream-like in the early morning, had now acquired colour and consistency, developing at every instant fresh varieties of form. Now stood

boldly out the noble headlands of the fantastically beautiful coast.

Lina had not been long content to remain quietly at her mother's side. Sicily was very pretty, she said, but she had already looked well at it, and then her bright eyes began to rove about in search of nearer objects of interest. To sit still doing nothing was at all times the hardest of tasks for the little girl, and this morning she was brimming over with life and excitement.

"Mamma, dear," she said presently, in that coaxing tone with which she generally prefaced some request not easy to be granted—"mamma, deary, I want to ask you a favour!"

"And what is it, my puss?" and Mrs. Gerard fondly patted the eager little face.

"Do let me go to the other end of the boat and talk to some of those soldiers who are guarding the convicts."

"No! Lina, certainly not. How can you ask such a thing?"

"But do let me, mamma. I want so badly to

know why they put those chains on the poor men. I am sure they must hurt them. The captain says I mustn't speak to the prisoners, and I don't care to do so, for they frighten me, but I am very sorry for them all the same, and would like to know something about them."

Mrs. Gerard glanced down shudderingly at the repulsive-looking criminals herded together in the centre of the deck. "Dear Lina," she said, "you will best show your pity for those unfortunate creatures by taking no notice of them, for if any of them still feel any shame at their wretched position, think how painful it must be to them to be stared at!"

"To be sure," and the child nodded her head reflectively, "I didn't think of that. I remember when I was a little girl" (Lina thought herself almost grown up now) "how vexed and ashamed I used to be if any one came into the room when I was in the corner. Oh! perhaps those men are so wicked because they were never put into the corner when they were little—that must be it, mustn't it, mamma?"

"Very likely, dear," said her mother, who did not care to enter on the wide subject of the causes of crime with her little girl. "Certainly they were all once innocent children, and let us hope they will repent and mend their ways before it be too late; but now try to forget all about them, and look at these lovely mountains. Why, in an hour or two you will be making acquaintance with your cousins."

Just then Lina saw the captain coming towards them, and scampered off to meet him, exclaiming, that he was very naughty, to have been out of sight so long.

He reminded her, laughingly, that he was not a passenger, and had to look after the management of his boat, and that he could not spare many minutes to chat with her. "Look about you now," he continued, in his jolly, cheery voice, "and I'll show you the famous statue of Santa Rosalia."

Indeed they were rapidly nearing the land now, though Palermo was still shut out by the noble crags of Monte Pellegrino, and the captain's finger was

pointing out a colossal headless figure on the summit.

“How ugly!” exclaimed Lina, in a vexed tone. “Why, I thought the statue of Santa Rosalia was very, very pretty. That thing is just like one of the old doll-stumps I left behind in Florence.”

The captain explained that the fierce winds had twice deprived the saint of her rose-crowned head, and that the pretty Rosalia Lina expected to see was in the cavern chapel the other side of the mountain; and on hearing this, Lina brightened up, and had a dozen questions to ask about the lines of tunny boats they could see far away on their right, near the tiny Isola delle Femmine.

“And oh what a pretty beach!” she shouted, as she noticed a small bay past a straggling village, and a picturesque round tower on a rocky point. “How I should like to go there! I wonder whether there are any shells there!”

“Shells! I should think so,” replied her friend, the captain. “That bay is a perfect paradise for little girls, and I fancy you have a much better

chance of going there than to Stromboli. If we were nearer in-shore you would see that the beach is all pink with coral."

"Coral!" cried Lina, in a frenzy of delight. "Mamma, do you hear that?"

"Are you telling my little girl a fairy tale?" inquired Mrs. Gerard, with an incredulous smile.

"No, Signora, the beach is really strewn with coral, or perhaps I should say coralline, in very tiny fragments, and there are millions of shells of all sizes."

By this time they had rounded island-like Monte Pellegrino, and before them, at last, lay the fair city of Palermo; its numerous coloured domes and spires glittering in the mid-day sun—a true jewel in a golden shell. This exquisitely lovely and luxuriant valley of Palermo is, as my little readers may or may not know, called by the name of the Conca d'Oro, or golden shell, on account of its form, and of the masses of orange groves, laden with golden fruit, that sweep up the valley from the back of the town almost to the walls of Monreale, half way up

the steep flank of castle-crowned Monte Caputo. Mrs. Gerard forgot all her troubles as she gazed in breathless admiration at the glorious panorama before her. There lay the shining city, the many-tinted luxuriant valley, encircled and sheltered by a mountain amphitheatre, of which the highest point, the peak of Monte Acuto, towered up clear and sharp against the pure blue sky. Even Lina left off jumping about to listen with attentive ears to the names of the different mountains that the captain was pointing out.

"I know them all now, mamma," she said at last, "and it is the very nicest geography lesson I ever had. So much easier than learning from dry old books and puzzling maps. Listen: that steep, jagged rock, jutting out into the sea opposite Monte Pellegrino, is Capo Zafferana, and the great one behind it is Monte Gibelrossa, and then comes Monte Grifone and Monte Falcone. In the middle there is Monte Caputo, and Monte Acuto, and Monte Billemi; and there is Capo di Gallo, that curious mountain, with a cleft in it as though

a slice had been cut out of it, that we saw before we got into the bay, but now it is hidden by this craggy, jaggy Monte Pellegrino. There," and she stopped for breath, "you see I do know all the mountains, and I am sure I shall always like this dear old Monte Pellegrino best of all, just because it was the first bit of Sicily I knew anything about."

"Brava, Lina," said Mrs. Gerard, smiling at her child's new-born ardour for geography; "but what of your old friend Mount Etna—have you quite forgotten it?"

Lina shrugged her shoulders in a very disdainful kind of way.

"Oh! I'm tired of Mount Etna. I did see it a little this morning, and it is only a great heap of snow, not half such fun as Mount Vesuvius."

The captain came up to them again just then. "What is that I hear?" he said, in a tone of mock horror. "You must ask mamma to take you to Catania, and then you'll see what a mighty fellow is this old Etna you despise so now. Why, all

these mountains are mere molehills in comparison. Do you know it is eleven thousand feet high, and no less than one hundred and twenty miles round at its base?"

Lina was not much impressed by these figures, for now they were gliding past the gardens of the majestic Belmonte Villa, with its masses of Indian figs and fine groups of pines and queer little temples, and were rapidly approaching the crowded port; so much was there to be seen that her bright little eyes could not flash about half quickly enough.

All was bustle and confusion now on board; the luggage was being hauled up from the hold, the passengers were rushing to and fro and up and down the cabin stairs collecting bags and wraps and hat boxes, and the convicts were huddled still closer together, surrounded by a strong guard of Bersaglieri. A fleet of small boats had flocked round the steamer, and hundreds of tongues were shouting, screaming, swearing in the strangely uncouth Sicilian dialect.

"What shall we do, Lina, if your uncle does not

come to meet us?" said Mrs. Gerard, feeling thoroughly bewildered at the confusion and noise, and with a sort of feeling that it would be all but impossible to get herself, her child, and her belongings safely to land.

"Oh! he's sure to come, mamma," cheerfully answered Lina, who naturally had no responsibilities in the shape of luggage, and tickets, and keys, and custom-house troubles weighing on her mind; "and if not, the captain will take care of us. Shall I ask him?" and she would have dashed away to find him, had not her mother prevented her.

"You have teased him enough already, Lina, and must not disturb him now; but, oh dear! how will my brother-in-law know us in this crowd?"

At that moment Lina, who was looking over the side, saw a boat coming near the steamer with a gentleman and a little girl in it. "Look, mamma," she cried, instantly, tugging her mother's dress; "isn't that Uncle Pasquale, and surely that tall girl must be cousin Rosalia? I am sure it must be."

Her mother looked eagerly at the occupants of

the boat. "It may be—I think so," she said hurriedly. "That bright, fair-haired girl is very like what my sister used to be as a child, but I can't be sure. We shall see when they are on board."

But the child was too excited to wait, so, flourishing a handkerchief over her head, she shouted at the top of her voice: "Sei tu, Rosalia? sei tu? Io son la Lina ed ecco la mamma." (Is it thou, Rosalia? is it thou? I am Lina, and here's mamma.) She had guessed aright. Cries of welcome and joyful smiles and nods came from the boat, and soon the uncle and cousin had reached the deck, and Lina and Rosalia were kissing and hugging as though they had known each other all their little lives, while Mrs. Gerard, half laughing, half crying, was shaking hands with Signor Altovito, feeling relieved of all anxieties under the care of her sister's husband. A few minutes more, and they were all in the boat together, threading their way towards the shore, through a maze of other boats laden with passengers and convicts and merchandise, and amid a tumult of cries and oaths, as each boat-

man tried to get ahead of his fellows. That, however, was soon over, the weary journey done; they touched Sicilian soil, and were presently driving swiftly along the busy sunlit streets near the port towards Aunt Caroline's house in Largo Santo Spirito.

CHAPTER III.

COUSIN ROSALIA'S EXAMPLE.

LITTLE Lina was by no means an early bird the first morning after her arrival in Palermo. She had gone to bed fairly worn out with fatigue and excitement. Everything was so new, and strange, and pleasant. There was pretty Aunt Caroline, with her low, gentle voice and kindly manner, so like mamma, only paler and thinner, tottering up from the sofa, on which a great portion of her invalid life was passed, to welcome them with outstretched arms, and smiles and tears. Why she and mamma should have cried so much, when they were so very glad to see each other, was a question that puzzled Lina not a little. It was a great comfort, she thought, that her cheery, handsome Sicilian uncle had not cried also, nor that darling

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Rosalia, who had already taken fast hold of her heart. However, there came a moment, that first evening in Sicily, when Lina herself was very very near shedding a few tears. The only guest-chamber in the modest little household happened to be a very small one, and so it had been settled that Mrs. Gerard was to occupy it alone, while Lina was to share with Rosalia a big upstairs room under the roof that was a delightful combination of a sleeping and play room. Now Lina had liked this arrangement amazingly when it was first mentioned, but when bed-time came, and her mother, after undressing her, had given her a great many last kisses, the child's heart failed her, and it needed a mighty gulp to swallow down her tears. Never since she could remember had she passed a night away from her mother's side, and in spite of the kindness of her new-found cousin, she did not at all relish doing so. It was only the fear lest Rosalia should think her a baby, that rendered that gulp effectual. Luckily, however, she was so weary that two minutes after Mrs. Gerard had left the room,

and long before Rosalia had finished brushing out her plaits of long fair hair, she was so fast asleep that all the vessels in the port might have fired off royal salutes without awakening her.

When at last she did open her eyes, at first she thought she had only just come to bed, for there was Rosalia standing before the table, brushing her hair with great vigour, precisely as Lina had seen her doing while she was falling asleep the night before, only now, strange to say, there were no candles burning, and it was broad daylight.

She yawned and rubbed her eyes. "Is it really morning?" she asked, in a thick, sleepy voice; "and are you getting up already, Rosalia?" Rosalia was at the bedside in an instant, and dived inside the mosquito curtains to kiss her cousin.

"Why, it is nearly eight o'clock!" she said, "but I have been moving about very softly, so as not to wake you. How nice it is to have you here! Do you know, for the last week I have looked at this bed every morning, saying to myself, 'It is only six days now before cousin Lina will come; it

is only five ;' and so on ? and now you are really here, and there is no more counting to be done."

"And who has dressed you ?" asked Lina, presently, after warmly returning her cousin's kisses.

"Why, nobody, to be sure," said Rosalia, with a grand flourish of the brush she held in her hand. "Do you think I'm a baby ? I always dress myself, and then, when poor mamma has had her coffee in bed, I go and help her to dress before my governess comes. Now that I am a big girl, I have many things to think about, and I have to try to make myself useful, as poor mamma is nearly always ill. Why, I always order the dinner, and keep the maids to their work, you know," continued the little girl, in a grave and confidential tone ; "these Sicilian servants are rather lazy ; mamma says English ones are a great deal better."

Lina listened to these confidences with much bewilderment, and began to fear that her cousin would think her a dreadful baby. "How old are you, Rosalia ?" she inquired, in quite a respectful manner.

"Ten-and-a-half" was the proud reply ; "so you

see I shall soon be grown up. Don't you think you had better get out of bed now?"

"But"—and again Lina yawned and stretched her tired little limbs—"I must wait till mamma comes in to dress me. It is true, I did dress myself yesterday on board the steamer," she went on triumphantly, "but I don't think the buttons and strings were *quite* right!"

"Oh! but I can help you," said Rosalia, cheerfully. "It's very easy when you're used to it, and Aunt Maria must be so tired, it will be very nice for her to find you all ready when she comes upstairs."

"But there's my bath," hesitated Lina, the corners of her mouth dropping a tiny bit. "Mamma says little girls *never* soap themselves properly. Do you really wash yourself?" she asked, with wide open eyes.

"Of course I do; but I don't take a bath quite every morning: I have too many things to think of. We can soon manage yours, though. I'll ring for old Alfonsa to bring the water." Then the active little person tugged out a bath from under the bed,

the water was brought, and before Lina had quite settled in her mind whether it would be right to attempt the grand operation of washing herself, she was splashing about in the cool water, and her cousin applying the soap with a reckless energy that quite took Lina's breath away.

"Oh! take care of my eyes, please!" she gasped, as the lather flew about her in a blinding shower.

"Never mind that," said Rosalia, and dab came a spongeful of water to relieve the smarting.

"Oh dear, what a mess we have made!" exclaimed Lina, breathless and panting, as she stood rubbing herself with a heap of towels—and all in a glow with her unwonted exertions—as she glanced at the lake that surrounded the bath.

"That doesn't signify," said Rosalia, quite warm and breathless too, hastily buttoning on her dress. "Nothing hurts these tile floors, they are so nice and clean, and I'll take care that Alfonsa wipes up all the water."

"The floor is very pretty," remarked Lina, leaving off rubbing herself to look down at the bright

patterned Sicilian tiles from the safe refuge of the chair on which she had jumped, to be out of the way of the inundation; "but aren't they rather cold? We have brick floors in Florence, but we put carpets over them in the winter."

"It's never very cold here," said Rosalia, popping Lina's clothes over her head. "There, I know you are dry by this time. Let us make haste, and I'll take you out on the terrace to have a peep at my rabbits before we go down to breakfast."

"Rabbits!" shrieked Lina, joyfully; and the magic of that word dispelled half the dreaded difficulties of buttons and strings, and sent the comb easily through the tangles of her thick curly mane, though—none of mamma's hair-pins being at hand to screw it up out of danger on the top of her head—it had got rather wet in the course of her bath.

Such a merry pair they were as they stood before the hutch, in a sheltered corner of the big terrace, from which they could see the blue sea dotted with faint distant islands, and the mountains, and a wilderness of house-tops, and green and yellow domes,

and slender bell-towers. Rosalia lost all her grave, housekeeper looks while holding up the soft, furry little creatures before Lina's admiring eyes, and when, presently, Mrs. Gerard made her way upstairs to awaken her travel-worn Lina, she found her already dressed, with shining hair and brightly glowing face, stroking and petting a lapful of bright-eyed rabbits.

"Good morning, mamma, darling!" shouted Lina, hastily dropping her treasures to rush into her mother's arms. "Rosalia is going to teach me to be as clever as she is; and I've had, oh such a jolly bath!"

Mrs. Gerard shook her head a little as she glanced at the untidy, sloppy room; but she felt it was good for her child to learn to depend on herself a little more, and after admiring the rabbits to her niece's content, they all went down to breakfast together, English fashion, on the floor below, where Signor Altovito was already waiting for them.

"But my other cousin," asked Lina, looking round the room, and remembering, for the first

time, that she had not yet seen Francesco ; " where is he ?"

"What, Ciccio ? he is at school, but you'll see him to-day as this is the Festa d'Ognissanti (All Saints Day), and he will be at home to-morrow too. He is such a dear little fellow ; just your age, Lina. I am sure you will like him very much, and we will have such fun together," said Rosalia, with a bright smile and merry nod, and then, having placed a cup of coffee and some tiny slices of bread-and-butter on a little tray, she disappeared with them into the adjoining room, where her mother was still in bed.

Her father looked after her with a fond glance. "That child is our right hand," he said, turning to Mrs. Gerard. "She manages everything now that her mother is such an invalid."

"How long has Caroline been in this state ?" asked Mrs. Gerard, anxiously. "She never wrote to me that she was ill, and I was terribly shocked yesterday to find her so changed."

"She has been getting into a low way for a long

time, in fact ever since the death of our little baby ; but the doctors say that it is only her nerves," answered Signor Altovito, with a mournful shake of the head. "Perhaps, now that you are here, she may brighten up a little, and try to exert herself. She gets weaker and weaker from lying in bed so much. I do not know what I should do without Rosalia, who is as great a comfort to us as your Lina is to you."

Little Lina reddened, and looked up from her coffee with rather an uneasy expression. "I am afraid I shall never be as good and clever as Rosalia," she exclaimed ; "but she is going to teach me to do everything for myself, that I may not give mamma any more trouble. Please, mamma, will you butter my bread for me ?"

Her mother complied, laughing ; she knew that some time must elapse before her baby Lina learned to do everything for herself, and, to tell the truth, she was in no great hurry for that time to come.

"Mamma, mamma ! what are these funny little

seeds all over the bread?" shouted Lina, holding up in astonishment a roll of the firm, close Sicilian bread, all besprinkled with sesame seeds. "They are so nice," she continued, picking them out and eating them very fast. "Don't I wish the bread were full of them!"

"You shall have plenty more," whispered Rosalia, who had returned to her seat by her cousin's side. "I know where there is a big packet of them on a shelf in the kitchen; we'll go and get some presently."

Breakfast over, Uncle Pasquale lit his cigar and prepared to go out, stating that he should come back early in the afternoon, and drive them all to the Giardino Inglese. "We Sicilians keep our *festa* days in good earnest," said he to his sister-in-law, "and all Palermo will be in the streets to-day, for there is a great deal of shopping to be done, isn't there, my Lia?" he concluded, with a mysterious nod to his daughter as he left the room, that greatly excited Lina's curiosity.

Then, Mrs. Gerard having gone into the next

room for a confidential chat with the sister from whom she had been so long separated, Rosalia carried her cousin off into the drawing-room, in order to watch for Ciccio's arrival at the window looking on to the Piazza.

CHAPTER IV.

CICCIO MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.

"WHAT a pretty, funny room!" exclaimed Lina, as her cousin opened a door at the end of a narrow passage beyond the plain, undecorated dining-room, and they ran into a big round room, hung with red satin, with red satin ottomans against the walls, and four marble pillars in the middle. A large French window opened into a balcony overlooking the quaint, irregular Piazza of Largo Santo Spirito, one of the prettiest of Palermo's many squares. In the centre was a large basin, encircled by a luxuriant growth of canna Indica, and from the midst of the great glossy green leaves a sea-horse and a couple of stone children spurted up shoots of sparkling water into the clear air. Beyond the archless "Felice" gate the blue waters of the bay were flashing and gleaming, rippled by a gentle

breeze. Away to the left a forest of masts showed the whereabouts of the port, while to the right, beyond the narrow opening of the street of which this house formed the corner, a broad flight of time-worn steps led to the grand terrace of the Palazzo Butera, overhanging the Marina, with its avenue of coral trees.*

In a moment Lina had dashed out into the balcony.

"Oh! how pretty it all is!" she cried. "I wish mamma would always live here instead of in Florence; and oh! I never saw such a nice, funny drawing-room before," she went on, bouncing back into the room. "Do you think Aunt Caroline would be very angry if we climbed up these pillars? I should so like to try"—and forthwith Lina threw her arms round the slippery marble, and tried hard, but in vain, to swarm up to the ceiling; while Rosalia, in fits of laughter, was only prevented by the consciousness of her superior age from following her cousin's example.

* *Erythrina corallodendron.*

"But this isn't the drawing-room, only an ante-chamber," she said at last, lifting a door curtain, and disclosing a still prettier room, bright with amber hangings and mirrors and gilding, and with all sorts of odd nooks and recesses in it.

Lina, who by this time was again half-way up one of the pillars, slid down in such a hurry to follow her cousin that she came to the floor with a heavy thump, and had to pick herself up all flushed and panting, also, though she would not have owned it for worlds, a little bit bruised.

"See!" said Rosalia, pointing to a pretty inlaid stand near a flower-table in the biggest recess of this picturesque room—"see, all those things are mine."

"What treasures! Oh, how I wish I had any lovely things like these!" cried Lina. And indeed it was a collection to make any little girl's mouth water, for it seemed to comprise all the objects most children gaze at longingly in shop windows, and think they would like to possess.

First of all, on the topmost shelf, was a set of tiny doll's furniture of carved ivory, a sofa, chairs,

arm-chairs, tables, bedstead, toilet-stand, and even the sweetest little cradle with blue silk curtains, enough things to luxuriously furnish at least two rooms of a good-sized doll's house. Then there were two dear little pug-dogs in Dresden china, to keep guard over these valuables, and there were little baskets of many-hued Venetian glass and balls of polished carnelian and Sicilian agate, and some rare tropical shells. On the middle shelf were half a dozen bon-bon boxes of different shapes and kinds, a beautiful work-case with a complete set of instruments, and a red Russian leather desk, a velvet-bound album, and a pretty little oxidised donkey, with gilt panniers, that did duty for an ink-stand. There were some little wee vases, a variety of small knick-knacks, and a French doll with a smiling biscuit-china face, and real hair, arrayed in the extreme of Paris fashion. On the third and last shelf was a dainty china tea-service of the prettiest pattern Lina had ever seen, delicate trails of ivy with tufts of pink moss rose-buds and lilies of the valley.

"Oh ! oh !! oh !!!" she exclaimed. "How did you get all these darling things, and, please, may I touch them ?"

"If you are very careful with them you may," said Rosalia, magnanimously ; "a good many of them were given to me when I was a little thing, and mamma kept them for me. It is only lately that I have been allowed to keep them here, and take care of them myself. They are safer here than in my own room, where they might get broken when Ciccio and I are romping," continued Rosalia, confidentially ; "for though he's a very good boy, he would be sure to break them and knock them about. Boys always do smash everything, you know."

"Do they ?" said Lina, who had had no experience of boys' ways, pausing in her examination of a mauve satin Easter egg to reflect whether it would be wise to unpack her own favourite possessions before Ciccio went back to school.

"By the way, Ciccio ought to be here by this time," pursued Rosalia, setting in order the dainty ivory chairs. "Where can he be, I wonder ?"

There was no need to repeat the question, for the door of the antechamber opened with a bang, and in rushed the boy cousin Lina had so long wished to see.

Now that she did see him, she thought him the very oddest boy she had ever beheld. He was small for his age, not as tall, therefore, as herself ; had a little nubby round face with the tiniest dot of a nose in the middle of it, a pair of twinkling, mischievous black eyes, and a broad, good-tempered mouth, generally, as at that moment, expanded into the heartiest of grins. He had a great shock of bristly light hair, on which a gold-laced cap was coquettishly perched, and his stout little person was encased in a tight-fitting jacket and trousers with crimson facings and gold stripes, and his fat spuds of hands were stuffed into neatly-fitting white kid gloves. Altogether, he was so unlike the cousin Ciccio Lina had expected to see, that instead of running forward to greet him like Rosalia did, she burst into a great fit of laughter, and exclaimed :

“ Why, he is just like a little officer ;” then off she

went into another peal, and laughter being contagious, Rosalia and her brother joined in too, and laughed and laughed without exactly knowing why, until the tears ran down their cheeks. The cause of all this mirth was the first to recover his gravity, and, drawing himself up in what he supposed to be a very dignified manner, he said, in an injured tone :

“I say, Rosalia, it is too bad ; why does everybody laugh the very first time they see me ? . What’s the matter with me ? It was bad enough when I was a little chap in petticoats, and even mamma used to quiz me and call me her little Paddy (whatever that may mean), but now that I wear the school uniform, I can’t make out what there is to laugh at ?”

Rosalia hastened to soothe him by explaining that evidently Lina was not accustomed to see boys in uniforms, and Lina herself, after one more burst, for Ciccio looked ten times more comical now that he had puckered up his quaint little face into extreme gravity, confirmed the statement, and told

him, with a hearty hug, how very glad she was to see him.

"And what are you girls doing in here?" inquired Ciccio, looking loftily round the pretty room, pitching his cap down on the floor, and standing with his legs very far apart, and his hands in his pockets. "It's much jollier upstairs, where we can make as much mess and row as we like, without getting a scolding."

"Oh, yes! let us go upstairs, Ciccio," said Lina, trembling a little for Rosalia's treasures, "we only came here to look at all these beautiful things."

"Ah!" remarked Ciccio, still in the same swaggering attitude, "I suppose Lia has been showing you all the fine things her dead relations give her. She'll get some more to-morrow. Our dead grandpapa and grandmamma always make us beautiful presents every year.

Lina was horror-stricken. "You naughty boy," she cried, "why do you talk in that wicked way?"

Ciccio stared at her in blank astonishment. "Hollo! what's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Ask Lia, if it isn't all true. I daresay you will get something from your papa to-morrow."

At this Lina shrank away from him, turned very red, and began to cry. Even to her mother, it was only in a whisper that she would talk of the father she could hardly remember. No! she should never like Ciccio! "Rosalia," she sobbed, "tell him not to talk like that; he shan't talk like that, or I'll never, never play with him!"

Rosalia, who was busily re-arranging her toys, tried to comfort her little cousin.

"Ciccio did not mean to hurt you, dear," she said. "We do get presents every All Souls Day in remembrance of our dead relations; but of course only tiny children believe that it is really they who give them."

"Such bosh! you know," quoth Ciccio, shrugging his shoulders. "I am sure I haven't believed it for years. I am very sorry I made you cry, though, cousin Lina; but I thought, of course, you knew all about it. Here, give us a kiss and make it up."

And the kind-hearted little fellow, really grave for

the nonce, caught Lina round the waist and kissed away her tears. "I say," he went on, plaintively, "do let's go upstairs and on to the terrace. I mustn't stand on my head in here for fear of breaking something."

"Why does he want to stand on his head?" inquired Lina, much amazed; and Rosalia explained, as they scampered out of the room, that Ciccio was haunted by a continual desire to stand on his head, and lost no opportunity of gratifying that taste.

CHAPTER V.

SIGHTS.

YOU may be sure that, in spite of their mighty game of romp on the terrace, the children were quite ready for their promised drive some time before Uncle Pasquale was, and were now on their best behaviour in the drawing-room in order not to tire Signora Altovito, who liked to have them by her side for a while before they went out. Lina was filled with a sort of awe-struck pity for this poor Aunt Caroline, who only left her bed for her sofa, and who looked so pale, and pretty, and waxen. It disturbed all her notions about mammas in general to see this one so feeble and helpless.

What should she do ? she thought, if her mamma were in that state. She got quite melancholy with these reflections, but recovered her spirits at the

happy moment of being packed into the barouche, with Ciccio and Rosalia, opposite to her uncle and mamma, and as for describing her sensations during that delightful drive, I should best do so by writing a whole page of notes of admiration. However, as they would be rather stupid reading, I had better tell you simply what she did see.

As they turned out of the pretty square, past the splashing fountain, into the long narrow street, once the Cássaro, then the Toledo, and now the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele of Palermo, one of the most picturesque streets in Europe, they could see a long, long vista of grand old palaces, churches, and tall balconied houses, sloping upwards, for more than a mile in front of them, and ending in a dimly-seen archway with a high peaked roof, which Uncle Pasquale pointed out as Garibaldi's abode after that victorious hero had driven the Bourbonists out of Palermo in 1860.

Everything and everybody was very bright and aminated, for All Saints Day is a great *feſta* in Sicily. The road was so thronged with carriages

full of gaily-dressed ladies and merry children, the pavements with foot-passengers of innumerable beggars, that they could only crawl along at snails' pace; but that was all the better for Lina, as it gave her an opportunity of eagerly gazing at the wonderful confectioners' shops, which indeed are nowhere more tempting than in Palermo, and far surpassed any that our little heroine had ever seen.

These shops were all filled with customers, and outside loungers of all ranks were flattening their noses against the glass in rapt contemplation of the dainties within.

How glad Lina was when kind Uncle Pasquale stopped the carriage at the door of one of these glittering shops, in the most crowded part of the street, and leading the children in, bade Lina choose whatever she liked best! The child looked round bewildered at all the beautiful tempting things.

"What shall I take, mamma?" she whispered appealingly, tugging her mother's dress.

"What you like, dear, but nothing very big, you

know," suggested Mrs. Gerard, alarmed lest Lina might select one of the big flat sugared cakes adorned with a variety of gilded and coloured flowers, worthy of Mr. Gunter's finest Twelfth-cakes, that were ranged on the counter. Lina's eyes roved confusedly among a bright array of sugar saints, eatable children, mushrooms and fir-cones of almond paste, and all sorts of strange and wonderful animals, and, after a few moments of hesitation in favour of a huge lump of brown nougat and fascinating bun-shaped cakes from which cream was oozing on all sides, at last succeeded in pleasing both her eyes and her palate by fixing on a superb lamb in pure white sugar with a bright pink tail and ears. Rosalia was already munching an elephant of the same description, while Ciccio, who, boy-like, preferred size to appearance, was the proud possessor of an enormous and particularly sticky cake stuffed with candied fruits. Uncle Pasquale was buying chocolate bonbons in so reckless a manner that Mrs. Gerard hurried the party back to the carriage as quickly as possible, and, luckily, Lina admired her lamb so

much that she could not make up her mind to eat it, and only nibbled away one of its ears and the tip of its tail during the whole of the drive.

Presently they drew up before a resplendent toy-shop, on the other side of the way, and Uncle Pasquale, after mysteriously muttering something about certain little nephews, jumped out, and made his way in through a crowd of vociferous beggars (who forthwith besieged the carriage), without even offering to take the children with him, whereat Ciccio looked very knowing, and in spite of Rosalia's warning nudge, whispered to Lina :

"I told you so. Papa is gone to buy the *dead* presents for to-morrow."

Lina's eyes dilated in a frightened way, she left off playing with her lamb, and could not repress a slight shudder at the sight of the parcels her uncle was presently stowing away in the back of the carriage.

"What's the matter, my little one?" anxiously asked Mrs. Gerard, who knew nothing of the scene with Ciccio in the morning, as she noticed the change that had come over her child's face.

"Nothing, mamma," whispered Lina, pinching her mother's arm; "that is, I'll tell you all about it to-night."

Again the carriage stopped; this time before the steps leading up into the Piazza Pretoria, where there was a wonderful fountain, one of the finest in Europe, to be looked at and admired. Out danced the children, followed at a more sober pace by Signor Altovito and Mrs. Gerard.

"Ha, ha! you have nothing like this in your Florence," shouted Ciccio, partly because he liked teasing, partly because he couldn't as yet make up his mind to forgive his cousin for being taller than he was; and when Lina was unwillingly obliged to confess that her dear Florence had indeed no fountain to compare with this one, that patriotic little Palermitan would have stood on his head, in token of triumph, had not his father damped his enthusiasm by remarking that this glory of Palermo was, after all, the work of Florentine sculptors.

And now I think I must try to make a word-picture of this great fountain for the benefit of

those of my little readers who have only seen the insignificant little basins in Trafalgar Square, or still smaller ones, perhaps, on their own lawns. First of all, there is a wide open space paved with marble and surrounded by a marble balustrade, with an opening facing each side of the Piazza, flanked by colossal figures, called *Hermae*. From each of these four openings a flight of steps, bordered with statues of gods and goddesses, heroes and nymphs, leads up to the great basin, and these flights of stairs are divided one from the other by large reservoirs, into which water is splashing and dancing from the mouths of colossal heads of camels, bears, elephants, rams, bulls, and creatures of unknown species. From the large central basin spring three smaller ones, the first supported by huge, grotesque figures, called, as Lina learnt afterwards, *Winged Harpies*, and on its rim are four marble geese, in lifelike attitudes. A strange sort of pillar, resting on sea-horses, and formed of a group of boys and dolphins, supports the second small basin, and from this rises another group,

upholding the highest and last basin, in which stands a large boy with a cornucopia in his hand and a shell at his feet.

Such is this wonderful Fontana Pretoria, said to be unrivalled in Europe as regards its size and the complexity of its works, for the water gushes from no less than thirty-seven statues and twenty urns, and also from the mouths of twenty-four animals. Not that Lina understood any of these details at her first visit. All that she saw was a great, beautiful confusion of statues, and marble steps, and balustrades, with lovely, sparkling, glancing water gushing forth on all sides. Of what this dazzling medley consisted, she only learnt by further visits, and much poring over Mr. Murray's Sicilian Handbook, with her mother by her side to explain all the difficult terms. Mrs. Gerard soon found that, in spite of doing very few regular lessons during the first weeks of their stay in Palermo, her Lina's education was by no means at a standstill, for the little maiden was so much interested in all she saw, that her mind expanded to receive all

these new impressions like a floweret in the sunshine, and she picked up many odds and ends of knowledge, scraps of Sicilian history, and fragments of classical lore, that stood her in good stead in after-years.

This, however, is a digression, and all this time the children are gleefully running up and down the steps, peering into the basins, dipping their fingers into the water, and flirting drops in each others' faces (Ciccio was particularly expert at that trick), while the elders wandered about this thicket of statuary, praising this figure, criticising that, and pronouncing Gazini's graceful Venus to be the very best of all.

Then Uncle Pasquale hurried them back to the carriage, and they drove gaily through the animated, crowded street, past the many palaces with lofty pillared archways rising as high as the second or third story of an ordinary house, and past numerous churches, of which a swinging door or a lifted curtain allowed them momentary peeps at glittering interiors blazing with the light of innumerable

wax candles, and thronged with worshippers on this great feast of All Saints.

Now they reach that original Piazza of the "Four Corners"—the point of intersection of the city's two principal streets—with its varied architecture, its fountains, many statues of virgin martyrs, and seasons, and sovereigns, and royal eagles, and turn off down the Via Macqueda, only a shade less animated than the picturesque Corso, and soon they are out of the town; the houses have dwindled down from five stories to one, and they are passing through lines of carriages, amid luxuriant trees and brightly painted villas. In one direction they have dazzling glimpses of blue sea beyond the tall straight rows of the fantastically defiant Indian figs; on all the others are the slopes and peaks and cliffs and crags of the grand mountain amphitheatre that encloses the Golden Shell. Another stoppage, to give the children a run in the prettiest part of the English garden, where there are great masses of beautiful flowering shrubs, quite strange not only to Lina but to her mother also; and huge clumps of

pale blue plumbago, with festoons of deep red roses in beautiful contrast, and the large flowered jessamine growing up the trees, and trees themselves all loaded with blossoms, such as daturas, duranteas, and a variety of the gum cistus, known in Palermo under the poetical name of the aurora. This last, with its different coloured flowers, Lina declared to be exactly like the tin trees in her box of German toys, representing an Indian tiger hunt.

How the three children romped in and out and up and down those winding walks! and then they had a grand race to finish with, won by Rosalia, as was only natural, but in which Lina came in a good second, and Ciccio a bad third. Now Ciccio prided himself on his running, and was not at all pleased to have been distanced by Lina; so, to revenge himself, he said:

"I suppose it is because you are such a coward that you can run so fast, cousin Lina?"

"What do you mean, Ciccio?" said Rosalia, angrily; "I won't let you be rude to Lina. Remember how naughty you were this morning!"

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"Fiddle-de-dee," quoth Ciccio, contemptuously, snapping his fingers in his sister's face, and turning up his diminutive nose. "Was it my fault if she knew nothing about All Souls Day? It would just serve her right to take her to the Cappuccini to-morrow. Then, I bet, she would run away fast enough."

"You are a very nasty boy," exclaimed panting Lina, who was resting against the goal of victory—the pedestal of Garibaldi's bust. "I don't like you a bit, after all. Rosalia is a darling, but you do nothing but say disagreeable things. It's very unkind of you."

"Why, what's this? Are you, children, quarrelling already?" asked Signor Altovito, astonished at hearing such angry tones as he came up the slope with his sister-in-law.

Lina hesitated. She did not like to tell good-natured Uncle Pasquale that Ciccio was a nasty boy, so she asked:

"Do you think I should run away if I went to the Cappuccini, uncle? Ciccio says I should. He thinks I'm a coward; but I'm not."

"She does not look like one, does she?" said Uncle Pasquale to his sister-in-law, as he looked at his breathless little niece flashing defiant glances at Ciccio. "But who has been talking of the Cappuccini?" he continued, frowning at the little boy. "Come here, Master Ciccio, and have your ears pulled."

Apparently this threat was not very alarming to Ciccio, for, marching up to his father, the funny, square little boy stood looking so frankly and comically up in his face that Signor Altovito's anger subsided at once, and Mrs. Gerard burst out laughing at this odd little nephew of hers, and drawing him gently towards her, told him it was too happy a day to be spoiled by quarrelling or scolding, and beckoning Lina to her, bade the children kiss and make it up. This they speedily did, though our sensitive Lina was secretly unhappy that Ciccio should think her a coward, and determined to take the very first opportunity of proving to him that she was not. Now it was time to go home, for the sun was setting, and the

mountains had assumed all sorts of beautiful shapes of olive-green, purple, and pinky violet, and the gardens were almost empty. The streets, however, were nearly as crowded as ever, as they drove swiftly homewards. Suddenly, as they drew near the spacious Piazza Marina, with its cluster of noble young palms towering above the flowering shrubs in the garden, quiet Rosalia gave a great start, and, clasping her hands, she exclaimed :

“The fair, papa, the fair ; you know you promised to take us all to it. Do let us have one peep at it before we go home !”

Lina and Ciccio echoed the request, and, as usual, Uncle Pasquale let them have their way, and steered them dexterously among the gaudy stalls and booths that filled one side of the great Piazza. However, the children were very tired, the crowd was dense, and, pervaded by a strong smell of onions and garlic, the beggars were more unfortunate than ever ; so as soon as Rosalia and Lina had each bought a lovely doll's armchair of red velvet and cane, and Ciccio a terrible instrument of

torture, in the shape of a huge trumpet, they were glad to hurry home to dinner and Aunt Caroline. Lina said that her eyes ached as though she had been gazing into a kaleidoscope all those hours; and when her mother put her to bed, at the close of this eventful first day in Palermo, she was a great deal too sleepy to remember to ask Mrs. Gerard a single question about the mysterious presents for All Souls Day, or to inquire the meaning of Ciccio's dark hints about the Cap-puccini.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL SOULS DAY.

"WHY, how is it you children are still here?" asked Mrs. Gerard, in a tone of surprise, when, on leaving her sister's room the next morning about an hour after breakfast, she found Rosalia and Lina still in the dull dining-room. "I thought you were with Ciccio on the terrace."

It was not difficult to know where that young gentleman was, for he was amusing himself by performing on his trumpet, and its discordant blasts, vigorously and continuously repeated, were unpleasantly audible all over the house.

"I am waiting till Rosalia has finished her accounts, and can come and play with me, mamma," answered Lina, who, looking very bright and blooming in spite of the excitement of the previous

day, was delightedly undressing a superb doll, the exact counterpart of Rosalia's best one among the treasures in the drawing-room, which her uncle had given her that very morning.

"What an industrious little woman you are!" said Mrs. Gerard, going to the other end of the room where Rosalia was poring over a long narrow account-book, with all her hair pushed off her forehead, the better, apparently, to grapple with the formidable rows of scrawly figures that filled the open pages.

"These accounts are uncommonly tiresome to-day," sighed the child, raising a weary little face to meet her aunt's smile. "Old Alfonso always will note down everything in the old-fashioned Sicilian money, *grani* and *tari*, and then I have to find out what it all comes to in francs."

"That is indeed hard work for you," replied Mrs. Gerard, sitting down by the writing-table; "but if you tell me the value of these *grani* and *tari*, I can help you to do the sum. Now that I am here, dear, I don't mean to let all the weight of

your increased household cares rest on your brave little shoulders. I have been talking about it with your mamma this morning, and we have settled that I should undertake the household affairs this winter, so that you may have more time to play with Lina. It's not fair that she should have all the fun and you all the work, and I want you to be as bright and merry as she is."

"How very kind of you, Aunt Maria," said Rosalia, flushing with pleasure; "but, you see, you don't understand Sicilian, and if you won't think me rude, I know just what to order for mamma and papa."

"You are a dear, thoughtful child!" answered Mrs. Gerard, kissing Rosalia's forehead; "you may depend upon it I will not interfere with your ordering the dinner yet awhile, but I will not let you worry yourself with any of the bills and accounts. Now, give me a lesson in *grani* and *tari*, and let us set to work to add up this dreadful sum."

And, to Rosalia's surprise, Mrs. Gerard speedily

mastered the problem of turning Sicilian money into Italian, and the account was successfully balanced, as it were by magic.

It was with a very light heart then that Rosalia jumped away from the writing-table, and, after warmly thanking her aunt, danced off with Lina in search of noisy Ciccio.

"Why don't you play with that lovely paint-box Uncle Pasquale gave you this morning?" asked Lina, presently, while they were feeding the rabbits on the terrace.

"Oh! I mustn't play with it till to-morrow," said Rosalia, hastily, turning rather red.

"But why not?" pursued Lina, with astonished eyes.

"Oh! you silly!" exclaimed Ciccio, in a muffled voice, for at that moment he was standing on his head, in which favourite posture he had also been performing on his dreadful trumpet. "Of course she mustn't play with it, or I with my gun till to-morrow, because they are *dead* presents, you know, and so is your doll."

"It isn't," said Lina, angrily. "Uncle Pasquale gave it to me himself."

"It is a dead present all the same," persisted naughty Ciccio; "I do wonder you are not ashamed to play with it to-day."

"Hold your tongue, Ciccio; you behave horridly to Lina. I'm sure she will be very glad when you go back to school to-morrow," said Rosalia, with a warning nod to her obstinate brother.

"I don't care," sneered Ciccio, blowing a shrill blast on his trumpet, "she is silly, and she is wicked to play with that doll to-day."

"I'm not!" cried poor Lina, bursting into tears and hugging her beautiful French lady tightly in her arms.

"Ciccio!" exclaimed Rosalia, stamping her foot, "I'm out of patience with you. Look here, papa!" she cried, as Signor Altovito opportunely appeared upon the scene. "Please scold Ciccio; he is very naughty and unkind to poor Lina."

And for once really indignant, Rosalia, who generally shielded all her brother's misdemeanours,

gave her father a full and particular account of all the unkind, provoking things Ciccio had said to Lina. Uncle Pasquale frowned, and looked so displeased that generous little Lina began to fear that some dreadful punishment might be in store for her cousin, so, seizing her uncle's hand, and with eyes still wet with tears, she said very earnestly :

"Please not to punish Ciccio, dear uncle. I dare say he didn't mean to be so rude. I couldn't bear him to be punished on my account. Only just please tell him, won't you, that I may play with this lovely doll."

"Of course you may play with it, *carina*," said her uncle, kindly ; "what else did I give it you for ? Do you understand, master Ciccio ? get off your head and on to your feet, and come here and beg your cousin's pardon, and promise to be a better boy. If I don't punish you, remember it is only because she has begged you off ; but I tell you what, the very next time I catch you behaving badly to her, not even her supplications shall save you."

Ciccio stood before his father, twiddling his trumpet first in one hand and then in the other, half conquered, but still rather sulky.

"Give me a kiss, Cousin Ciccio," said Lina, softly, holding out her hand. "Don't let us quarrel any more."

Now this was very nice of Lina, and so even Ciccio thought; but still it did wound his dignity to have to stand tiptoe to kiss her. What business had a girl, no older than himself, to be so much taller?

As no one, however, guessed this secret grudge of his towards Lina, a lasting peace was supposed to have been concluded, and for some hours all went well. Later in the day Uncle Pasquale proposed a drive to some of the sights of Palermo, and all set merrily forth. All, that is, excepting Rosalia, who would not leave her mother two days running, she said, and had also some letters to write for her. That little maiden took so much pride in being the mainstay of the household, that she was now suffering from many unnecessary

pricks of conscience at having allowed her aunt to relieve her of the heaviest part of her burden, and insisted therefore on stopping at home this afternoon.

Luckily for Lina, who pulled a very long face at Rosalia's decision, Ciccio, who had quite recovered his temper, showed himself the comical, bright little fellow he usually was, and entertained her with many anecdotes of his school life as they drove through the streets and out into the country beyond the walls.

The two elders were as talkative as the children, for Mrs. Gerard was much interested in one of the most characteristic features of Palermo, the numerous and picturesque water towers. These *giarre* (as they are called), composed of earthenware jars, with their bottoms knocked out, piled one above the other to the requisite height, and covered with a coating of brickwork or masonry, serve to distribute the pure water which the countless aqueducts built by the Saracens bring down from all the neighbouring heights. Within the city they

are built into the houses or the corners of the streets ; in the country they stand alone, at irregular intervals, like upraised giant fingers. Nearly all are water-worn and stained with richest tints, overgrown with soft mosses and lichens and ferns of various kinds ; delicate fronds of maiden hair depending from every fissure. The children also listened eagerly to Signor Altovito's words ; Lina thinking how clever those old Saracens (of whom she had only the vaguest, haziest notions) must have been ; Ciccio, speculating what rare fun it would be to climb up some of the tallest of these *giarre* by means of the projecting iron clamps, and stand on his head in triumph at the top.

Soon they were out among the garden-belted villas in the road of the Emirs breathing the delicate fragrance of the blossoming locust trees, reached the object of their drive, the massive old Saracen palace of the Zisa, and were in the curious hall, the only part of the building untouched by modern alterations. Those of my little readers

who have seen the Alhambra Court of the Crystal Palace can form an idea of what this hall is like if they bear in mind that here the decorations are old and dilapidated, the gilding tarnished, the colours dim. There is a picturesque little fountain in the wall opposite the doorway falling into a channel across the floor. The ceiling is vaulted and elaborately honey-combed, and there are marble and granite pillars with fantastic capitals, surmounted by bands of quaint mosaics on a golden ground representing archers and peacocks. Lina was delighted with the peacocks, Ciccio with the archers; but what they really liked best of all was the scamper up many flights of stairs to the wide flat roof of the battlemented tower, from whence they looked over miles of orange groves dotted with golden fruit, and grey masses of olive-trees, relieved here and there by the rich glossy green of the carab, stretching away to the foot of the mountains, and over the city and the cactus and sumach plantations, to the glittering sea beyond.

“What is that picturesque old building near

here?" asked Mrs. Gerard, presently, pointing to a large convent in the midst of trees and gardens.

"That is the famous convent of the Cappuccini," answered Signor Altovito.

"By the way," he continued, lowering his voice, at which the children, especially Ciccio, of course immediately pricked up their ears, "I ought to take you there, for this being All Souls Day it will be lighted up, and, though certainly rather an unpleasant sight, one that all strangers should see."

Mrs. Gerard hesitated. "I should rather like to go," she said, "but these children—it would not do for them. I could not possibly take my Lina there."

"Of course not ; they can both wait for us in the carriage," answered Signor Altovito ; and raising his voice, he went on pointing out the various features of the magically beautiful prospect around them. No more was said upon the subject, and Lina could not understand why Ciccio should have become so strangely silent, and have left off playing with her to stand with his hands in his pockets, his

sturdy little legs far apart, and his mite of a nose turned skywards with an air of defiance. The others were already half-way down the two hundred and sixteen steps that led to the ground, and had called to him several times before he slowly and sulkily obeyed the summons.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPPUCCINI.

AFTER driving a short distance between garden walls, over which pink tufts of oleander, trails of roses, and tall aloe shafts were peeping, and past numerous water towers, they turned into a courtyard, with a cloister running round two of its sides. It was thronged with beggars of every age, of every degree of rags and filth, some lying, some standing, some crouching, and all assailing the new-comers with outstretched hands and vociferous supplications. Men, women, and children, for the most part dressed in black, were slowly passing in and out through a heavy door at one corner of the cloisters, where stood a group of rope-girded monks.

"I hardly like to leave the children among all these dreadful beggars," said Mrs. Gerard,

hesitatingly, as her brother-in-law handed her out of the carriage.

"It will not signify for a few minutes," he answered quickly. "They are torments, but the coachman will keep them off as much as he can, and, as you know, we Sicilians are accustomed to beggars. Now, children," he went on, emphatically, "mind you stop quite quietly in the carriage; we shall soon come back to you."

"Certainly, uncle," replied Lina, much engrossed at that moment by her precious doll, and rather astonished at the impressive manner in which Signor Altovito spoke.

Ciccio said not a word. He had folded his little arms, and was leaning back in his seat, a very caricature of offended dignity.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Cousin Ciccio?" inquired Lina, presently, after having spoken to him several times without getting an answer.

There was still no reply.

"Do please, talk to me, dear Ciccio," she pleaded

coaxingly. "I'm afraid of these nasty beggars: they are so rude. Look how they are thrusting their hands at us. One of them tugged my arm just now, and I've got nothing to give them."

Ciccio gave a sort of snort. "I'm very glad they worry you, Lina. It serves you right for being a coward, and spoiling a fellow's fun."

"Why, what have I done? You are not going to turn nasty with me again?" said poor Lina, piteously.

"What have you done? That's fine. Don't you know that this is the Cappuccini convent? I wanted so badly to go in, for all the other boys at school have been here, and papa would have taken us with him if you hadn't been such a coward; and now here we are left out among all these horrid creatures, and as the coachman has gone to sleep, I shouldn't wonder if they pulled us out of the carriage and ran away with us."

"Oh, Ciccio!" cried poor Lina, clinging to her tormentor in an agony of terror, as she saw that the coachman was indeed asleep and the whining

crowd round the carriage growing every instant more importunate." "I don't like stopping here. Let us jump out and stand by those monks in the doorway there, till mamma and uncle come back."

"All right!" said Ciccio, in quite a different tone; "only mind, it's you who want to get out, so don't be a sneak afterwards, and say it was me."

"No, no, I won't indeed!" exclaimed Lina, gulping down her sobs, only too thankful to escape at any price from the formidable beggars, and out they both jumped and scampered towards the big arch.

"The beggars are all coming after us," said Ciccio, artfully, as he saw one or two beginning to hobble across the courtyard; "we might as well go right in."

Poor little Lina, who by this time was in a fever of fright, would have gone to the world's end to escape from those loathsome supplicants. A group of respectable people dressed in black passed through the doorway, and, with an idea of finding protection in their company, the child slipped in after them, holding tight by Ciccio's hand. That

shocking little scoundrel was, I am sorry to say, chuckling joyously to himself at the way in which he had frightened his tall cousin, and beguiled her within the forbidden precincts. Now they found themselves in a narrow, dimly-lighted corridor. The people they were following suddenly turned to the right, and began descending a long flight of steps. Lina held back, vaguely frightened of she knew not what.

"Come along then," said Ciccio, sharply, his mischievous eyes sparkling with triumph. "Let us go down there too; we shall find papa perhaps."

"No! no! we mustn't," said Lina, suddenly remembering that she ought not to have come so far. "Let us stop; there are no beggars here."

"Nonsense, you coward! Come along, I say," and he tried to pull her down the stairs.

At that instant the people in front of them reached the big door at the bottom of the flight, pushed it open, and Lina had a glimpse of a far-stretching gallery, that looked to her like a curious underground church. Candles were glimmering on

all sides, groups of black-garbed people were walking up and down, and rows of ghastly, awful looking figures were ranged high up against the walls. Some of these were dressed like monks, some in ordinary clothes, which hung in a strange fashion about their limbs. Nearly all held bouquets of fresh flowers in stiff white-gloved hands. Some seemed to be quarrelling, some, drooping in helpless attitudes, to be receiving the confidences of the neighbouring figures bending towards them, while others grouped together had their arms raised in earnest gesticulation. A curious earthy smell came from the open door.

Lina shuddered and started back.

"Oh! what are you taking me to see, Ciccio? Who are those horrible creatures, and what are they doing, standing up there among the candles? They are much worse than the beggars."

"What a ninny you are!" said Ciccio, very contemptuously, though he too had grown rather pale. "You know nothing. Those people can't hurt you, for they are all *dead*."

"Dead!" shrieked Lina. "Oh, let me run away! Mamma! mamma! where are you, mamma?"

"Hold your stupid tongue, and come along," persisted Ciccio, quite in a passion.

"I won't! I won't! you are a very bad boy," she cried, clinging desperately to a stone pillar at her side.

Ciccio tugged her arm with all his might, but Lina was the stronger as well as the taller of the two, and, desperate with fright, she wrenched her hand from his grasp with a jerk, that made him lose his balance, and down he pitched, head foremost, to the bottom of the stairs. At that sight, and the sound of the dreadful thud of unlucky Ciccio's head against the stones, all Lina's dread of the ghastly terrors below was merged in the fear that Ciccio was dead, and that it was she who had killed him. With one great sob she rushed down the steps to where he lay in a heap moaning with pain, tried to lift him up, and called loudly for help.

"Poor Ciccio! dear Ciccio! are you much hurt?"

she cried, sobbing and panting with fright, as she saw drops of blood among his thick, light locks.

“Good Heavens! the children! It was Lina’s voice!” exclaimed Mrs. Gerard, who, at the other end of the corridor, had heard her child’s cry, and hurried to the spot. There followed a few moments of great bustle and confusion. Monks and candle-bearing visitors to the dead crowded round the children; poor Ciccio was picked up and carried into the monastery parlour, his head bathed, and his injuries examined. Luckily, having a thick skull well protected by a mop of hair, these proved to be slight; he was really more frightened than hurt.

The excitement over, and when they were driving homewards, Ciccio’s aching head reposing in his aunt’s lap, Signor Altovito began to question the children on how it had all happened, and why they had disobeyed orders by entering the convent instead of remaining in the carriage.

Lina began to explain:

“The coachman was asleep, Uncle Pasquale; and the beggars frightened us; and so——”

“Don’t mind what she says, papa ; it was all my fault,” interrupted Ciccio in a faint voice, pressing his cousin’s hand. “I frightened her, and made her come. It all serves me right ; and I tell you what, Lina, I’ll never call you a coward again ; you are a good, brave girl, and (with a sniff) I *won’t* mind your being the tallest. I know you can’t help it.”

And after this magnanimous declaration, peace was really made, and Ciccio quarrelled no more with his cousin Lina.

CHAPTER VIII.

PICTURE BOOKS UPON WHEELS.

"PICTURE BOOKS upon wheels! What can they be?" I fancy I hear some childish voices wonderingly exclaim. "How funny they must be, and how we should like to see them!" They are indeed funny, but to see them you would have to travel as far as Lina did. Right through Italy and across the Mediterranean to that irregularly triangular island of Sicily, placed as though the toe of the great Italian boot were about to kick it to the other side of the world. All the way to this island must you go to see the picture books upon wheels that so enchanted my little heroine; and as I think that very few of you fair-haired darlings of happy English nurseries are likely to roam so far away until you are too old to care much about picture books of this

kind, I will try to give you a little description of these and other strange sights and customs that often came before Lina's eyes in that shining city by the sea, Palermo in the golden shell.

First of all, though, I must tell you that the children were kept very quiet, and went no more excursions for some days after that adventure at the Cappuccini which might have had such serious consequences.

Little Lina looked so worn out and was so nervous on their return home, jumping out of her skin at every unexpected sound, that Mrs. Gerard feared she was going to be ill, and, instead of letting her sleep in Rosalia's room, kept her downstairs with herself. That did the child good morally, for her anxiety to leave room enough for dear mamma in the narrow bed almost made her forget the ghastly sights she had seen. It was so very nice to go to sleep with mamma sitting by her side and holding her hand just (she said) as though she were quite a little girl again. Still her dreams were haunted by the fright and excitement she had gone

through, and again and again she woke up shuddering, now dreaming that she was surrounded by clamorous beggars thrusting their faces close to hers and pulling her this way and that; now that horrible skeleton figures were staring at her with sightless eyes, shaking their fists at her and nodding their heads, while Ciccio was falling, falling, falling down endless flights of stairs, and brown-robed monks were keeping her back every time she tried to save him. What a comfort to find each time that it was only a dream, and that she was safe in mamma's bed, mamma's arms pressing her close, and mamma's kind voice charming away all her terrors!

So the next morning she slept quite late, and woke up as merry as ever to find her mother already up and dressed, and her beautiful doll lying in state with wide-open eyes on the pillow by her side.

Ciccio did not escape so easily. He had been in a high fever all night, and was too poorly in the morning even to rejoice at not being well enough to go back to school. He had to take nasty

medicine, and lie in bed all day; a very pale and contrite little boy, and very thankful for the company of his sister and cousin, who, when his headache had gone away, were allowed to go and play by his bedside. He gave Lina a great many kisses when she brought all her little treasures and play-things and set them out on his bed to amuse him, and was altogether such a repentant little invalid that, by common consent, everybody avoided mentioning the events of the past day.

The next day Uncle Pasquale had taken the little girls out walking to enjoy the sea breezes on the Marina, and they were tripping along by his side on the broad pavement, when Lina suddenly stood stock-still, transfixed with delight at the sight of a long train of carts laden with great blocks of beautiful lemon-coloured sulphur.

"What lovely, lovely carts!" she exclaimed; "they are regular picture books upon wheels; please let me stop and look at them."

"Why! they are only common carts," said Rosalia, laughing; for having seen them all her life she

did not consider them at all extraordinary. They are all like these."

"Are they?" said Lina. "How nice! How much I should like to have one! Don't you keep one, Uncle Pasquale?"

"No indeed; what should I do with it?" laughed her uncle. "Perhaps you would like me to take you for a drive in one to the English Garden?"

"Oh, that I should!" exclaimed Lina, dancing for joy at the mere mention of such a thing. "It would be delicious to ride in one of those pretty yellow carts, and look at all the pictures, and read the descriptions."

But as Lina's raptures would not give my little readers any very clear idea of these marvellous carts it will be better to describe what they are really like.

First, then, they are all painted canary colour, and are covered with gaudy representations of religious and historical scenes, and all manner of fanciful designs. Their construction is of the simplest; they are just oblong boxes upon wheels, and, as in most carts all over the world, the back

takes out or lets down for greater convenience in loading them with the orange boxes, or blocks of sulphur with which they are generally filled.

There are always two pictures on either side—a large one in front and another at the back. Sometimes the inner side of the panels is also covered with pictures, but commonly the inside and bottom are only ornamented with stiff patterns in red and blue. The pictures themselves represent, as I said before, a very wide range of subjects. Old Testament stories, the principal events in the life of our Saviour and the Virgin, are the chief favourites ; but you also frequently see Christopher Columbus at the Court of Queen Isabella and Christopher Columbus landing in America—which, by the way, is always written “Merica,” in unconscious sympathy perhaps with the transatlantic habit of dropping the initial letter of the word ; the sorrows of Romeo and Juliet, which my little readers will know all about when they are old enough to read Shakespeare ; and the exploits of Godfrey de Bouillon in Palestine, and the fatal delights of the wicked Armida’s enchanted

gardens, which they will find all about in Tasso's 'Jerusalem Delivered' as soon as they have mastered the difficulties of the Italian grammar—all have a place on these wonderful carts. Then, too, there are representations of purgatory with the reddest of flames surrounding the most repentant and miserable of sinners, and of the incidents of the Sicilian Vespers, which, by the way, is the only event of Sicilian history you ever see depicted on these carts. Of course the art is of the very crudest description, the background is invariably yellow, the heroes and heroines are all garbed in the brightest reds and blues, with terrific turbans and tremendously-trailing plumes, and are all in the most energetic and impossible attitudes. The general effect reminds you somewhat of Mr. Warne's well-known highly-coloured picture-books, though, certainly, as regards execution, that enterprising publisher would have good right to be deeply insulted by the comparison. Lina, however, did not look at these delightfully gaudy pictures with the eyes of a critic. It was enough for her that they

represented stories she knew or stories that she wanted to know ; and as long as she remained in Sicily, she never saw one of these carts without rushing after it if it were moving, or walking round it if it were standing still, to have a good look at the pictures upon it. Besides, the horses that draw them are nearly as fascinating as the carts themselves, for they have trappings thickly studded with brass-headed nails, blinkers of scarlet cloth embroidered in many colours ; strips of similar embroidery finished off with red worsted tassels hang from every part of the harness, and tall peaked saddles, on which the scarlet cloth is redder, the brass-headed nails brighter and more numerous, the embroidery richer than elsewhere, and which are crowned by nodding plumes of red, white, and green feathers. In addition to all these splendours there are often rows of little bells all over the headgear and saddle, and the hardy animals (they need hardihood on Sicilian roads) seem proud of their finery and of the ceaseless jingle that accompanies their steps.

There is greater variety in the costumes and appearance of the drivers, but Lina was generally too much absorbed examining the pictures on the carts to pay much attention to them. It was later in the year, on damp and chilly days that they, in their turn, began to excite her admiration ; for then she saw them clothed in those primitive shapeless sheepskin jackets and trousers, which, at a little distance, transform them into black or white bears, or ancient satyrs.

I do not know how long Lina would have gone on chattering about these entrancing carts, and minutely questioning her good-natured uncle, who liked nothing better than listening to her joyous prattle, had not a new subject of interest attracted her attention.

CHAPTER IX.

GOATS, PIGS, AND BOYS.

THEY had reached the end of the wide Marina, left the palaces and public gardens behind them, and were walking on, still by the side of the sea, through a very dirty and untidy suburb, among groups of swarthy bare-legged fishermen, as dark as the tanned nets they were mending and washing. There was a terrible odour of fish, in all stages of freshness and the reverse, but occasionally from the shabby houses opposite came a delicious whiff of lemon scent ; for it is here that the peel of oranges and lemons too much damaged, or otherwise unfit for sale, is converted into neroline, essence of lemon, and various other preparations, which in due time find their way to English shops.

Beyond these establishments, the houses, now

dwindled down to miserable hovels, receded from the road, and on the open space in front, all ploughed up by the active snouts of generations of pigs, there was a large flock of goats. They are the prettiest of creatures, these Sicilian goats, with their long twisted horns and silky hair that reaches to the ground. "Look, Lina, we are just in time to see the goats fed," said Uncle Pasquale, as the child began to exclaim at the beauty of these brown-and-white, and black-and-white, and all-white darlings.

And Lina did look, and saw a quantity of round baskets scattered about on the ground among the quietly expectant animals. Then a man appeared, who, setting down one of those huge deep baskets that everywhere in Italy you see carried about on men's backs, proceeded to deal out the green stuff it contained into the smaller ones; whereupon the goats quietly arranged themselves in pairs before these baskets, each of which held a double ration.

The children were much edified by this exemplary behaviour. Rosalia remarked that they were

as orderly as a school of young ladies at dinner, while Lina contrasted their conduct with that of the lions she had once seen fed at the Zoological Gardens in Florence.

"And they don't chatter over their meal, or want to jump up and down like some young people I know," said Uncle Pasquale, hastening to improve the occasion and smiling significantly at the little girls, who both looked rather conscious, since, like most children, they often found it irksome to behave with due decorum at table.

"How nice it would be to have one of those silky brown-and-white goats for a pet, uncle!" said Lina, presently, in a coaxing voice; "we could keep it up on the terrace, you know, and get a little round basket for it to eat from."

Her uncle laughed, but shook his head, saying, "Rosalia will tell you how her pet kid behaved."

"Did you really have one all for your own?" asked Lina, much excited.

"I did, indeed, and it was a darling while it was small; but it got so rough and rude when it grew

big, did so much mischief, and so often knocked me down, that at last I had to give it away, and then papa gave me my pretty little rabbits, which are no trouble at all."

"The kid must have been much nicer, though," said Lina, nodding her head in a very sage way; "the rabbits are so very stupid; they never seem to love us a bit, and care for nothing but their cabbage and lettuce leaves. All quiet things are stupid, aren't they, uncle?"

"H—m, not always," he replied; "and now I'll show you some other animals who are not quiet and yet are stupid."

So leaving the busily-munching goats, they walked a little further along the road to the spot where the river Oreto runs into the sea, and then they saw a great herd of pigs, some of enormous size, grubbing about on the shore among the heaps of black seaweed, rolling, and grovelling, and dabbling in the water, and otherwise enjoying themselves in true pig fashion.

"What a quantity of pigs! Where do they all

come from?" asked inquisitive Lina. "I never see any in Florence."

"Every one keeps pigs here," said Rosalia, "and the poor people hardly ever eat any other meat. Don't you remember how you laughed at seeing pigs tied up by a rope round their middle at nearly all the cottages we passed on our way to the Yisa?"

"Yes!" answered Lina, laughing again at the recollection, "one would think they were used as watch-dogs. What nasty ugly things they are! But I don't think they are very stupid, Uncle Pasquale," she went on. "Look at that great long-legged fellow there: what an active, intelligent look he has! I fancy I should soon get to like pigs if they weren't so rough and rude, and didn't have such a nasty smell."

"I suppose a great deal depends upon education, even for pigs," said Rosalia, reflectively. "Perhaps if one had quite a little one and kept it very clean, it would grow up gentle and well behaved!"

Then Uncle Pasquale said it was time to turn back, and as they walked towards the town it was

hard to say which little tongue wagged fastest ; both children had so much to talk about, so many questions to ask. When they came to the Porta Felice, near their home, their uncle pulled out his watch and announced that, as there was half an hour to spare before their own dinner-time, he would take them into the Old Market, and let them compare the behaviour of hungry little boys with that of pigs and goats.

"You dear papa! you are going to take us to see the Lucky Pot, I am sure!" exclaimed Rosalia ; "that will be fun. Alfonsa has told me about it. I have often wanted to go, only—what a dreadful pity Ciccio isn't with us! Hadn't we better wait till another day and take him?"

Her father shook his head. It was Ciccio's own fault, he said gravely, that he was not with them.

"But what is this Lucky Pot?" enquired Lina, with great eagerness, and Rosalia was going to tell her, when Signor Altovito stopped her, saying that Lina would find it all the funnier if she knew nothing about it beforehand.

So they plunged into one of the narrow old winding streets branching off from the Corso and were soon in the busy crowded market-place. Lina did not even look at the stalls stocked with flesh and fish and various kinds of poultry, but came to a sudden halt among the fruitsellers to admire the nice juicy India figs, all ready peeled, and neatly arranged on white plates in little heaps of five or six. Very pretty and tempting do these figs look, for some are bright magenta, some pale green, some white, some orange-coloured. Their flavour, too, is sweet and cool and refreshing, something like that of a very watery pear. Those grown at Palermo are the best in the world; they are very nourishing and very cheap, and at certain times of the year are the principal food of the poor people. But Lina did not know anything about that, she was only thinking what pretty fruit they were, and how cleverly the men were peeling them with one whisk of the knife, without ever pricking their fingers with the hair-like prickles with which they are covered.

Then there were piles of huge pomegranates, some cut in halves, some bursting from over ripeness and allowing you just a glimpse of the red richness within. There were oranges and lemons, too, in profusion, and whole branches of golden mandarins, with their shining, pointed leaves, and dried figs strung on canes, or made into flat dishes and decorated—like the joints of meat—with a patch of gilt foil ; and monster pumpkins, and quantities of vegetables of every kind, especially of enormous cauliflowers, with a rich purple bloom upon them, and so very big that two or three make a respectable load for a robust donkey ; and masses of lovely roses, jessamine, tuberoses, and many other flowers.

But Uncle Pasquale hurried the children away from all these pretty things, and through the noisy crowd of buyers and sellers, and past the fried fish shop, whence came such appetising odours, and on till they came to a stall, surrounded by a throng of shouting, gesticulating boys and girls, amongst whom they with difficulty forced their way towards the centre of attraction, the Lucky Pot, a big,

bubbling cauldron, by the side of which a red-faced man, with a white cap on his head, and bare arms, was brandishing a prodigiously long two-pronged fork.

"A halfpenny a dip, a halfpenny a dip!" this man was crying at the top of his lusty Sicilian voice; and the boys, shoving and pushing for a front place, in turn paid their halfpenny, and grasping the fork, plunged it into the pot. Great was the excitement whenever the fork reappeared, imbedded in a lump of meat. The successful speculator was cheered, and withdrew from the front rank to eat his scalding winnings in triumph. Sometimes a boy would poise his fork carefully, and after watching the simmering broth with breathless attention, at last make a dab at some exceptionally big bit as it rose to the surface; and then what wrath and disappointment as the fork came out with perhaps a mere fragment of bone or gristle, or, worse still, with nothing at all upon it.

One boy greatly excited Lina's pity. He was smaller than most of the others, quieter, and rather less dirty. She had seen him struggling for



THE LUCKY POT.

some time before he could get near enough to make his venture. Then, his halfpenny paid, he had made a sudden dip, and got nothing. Instead of howling like the others, when unsuccessful, he only sighed, bit his lips, and, after a long fumble in the pocket of his ragged trousers, fished out another coin. This time he waited quite a minute, fork in hand, before risking his last chance. Then he made his plunge, and again fished out nothing at all.

Lina tugged her uncle's coat, "Please let me have a try," she whispered hurriedly.

Her uncle was astonished, but granted her request, and handed a *soldo* to the red-faced man. The boys were quite still for a moment, in wonder at seeing a young lady try her luck among them. Trembling with excitement, Lina seized the greasy fork, and without an instant's pause plunged it into the pot, and brought it out speared in a bit of meat as large as a moderately-sized chop.

"Well, now you must take it in your fingers to eat it," laughed her uncle, seeing her look round as though she didn't know what to do with her prize.

But Lina did not want it for herself, and making her way to where her unlucky predecessor was looking on with hungry, envious eyes, she held out to him the tempting morsel, saying, with an encouraging nod, "Take it, little boy, it is for you." How his face brightened up, and how he bade the Virgin bless the kind signorina as he seized the meat in his fingers!

"Bravo! my little good-heart!" exclaimed her uncle. "Now it is time to go home, unless Rosalia would like to try her luck too."

But Rosalia shook her head just a little disdainfully. She was too big to compromise her dignity in that fashion; and though she liked Lina's kindness to the little boy, she secretly hoped that no one in the crowd knew who they were. Perhaps, as Lina was a stranger, it did not matter so much; but it would never do for Rosalia Altovito to do such a thing. Evidently, Mrs. Grundy is as much feared at Palermo as elsewhere in the world.

CHAPTER X.

SHELLS AND SAND.

WERE I to describe in full all the beautiful places and things little Lina saw during the first happy weeks of her stay at Palermo, this little tale would be transformed into something very like a guide-book.

Sometimes with her mother, but much oftener with her uncle and Rosalia (Mrs. Gerard preferring the society of her beloved invalid sister to any sort of sight-seeing), Lina roamed about all the marble-lined, fantastically-decorated churches, danced through the gorgeous saloons of the royal palace, and across the long breezy terrace, high in air, that led to the pavilion over the city-gate, where Garibaldi had dwelt in 1860, and from whence his keen eye had kept watch on all the

approaches to the city he had freed from the cruel grasp of the wicked King Ferdinand of Naples. Those observant brown eyes of hers had glistened with delight at the exquisite beauty of the Palatine Chapel, which is perhaps the most perfect little church in the world. A very jewel, with its beautiful marbles and marvellously-glowing mosaics just revealed by a few straggling rays of bright Sicilian sunshine. She had had a merry jolting drive up the steep hill of Monreale, from whence they looked down upon the fairy city beneath, begirt by glossy orange-groves and dazzlingly-blue sea ; and then, as they passed the great doors of the gorgeous Monreale Cathedral, even Lina's nimble tongue was hushed into awestruck silence for nearly two whole minutes, as she saw the grand, majestic faces of our Saviour and the Evangelists looking down upon her with solemn kindness from the mosaic-encrusted vault.

There she had seen all the events of sacred history, from the Creation to the Crucifixion and Resurrection, depicted in the rich mosaics that line

the walls of this mighty building ; and so deep an impression did it all make on her sensitive imagination, that she was a very quiet Lina for the remainder of the day ; and when she was being undressed, in the evening, she told her mother she was sure she should never again feel frightened in the dark, for as soon as she closed her eyes, she could see those glorious faces, high up above her head, watching over and protecting her.

Then, too, there were many happy afternoons spent in more child-like fashion, scampering up and down the steep breezy walks in the grounds of the stately Belmonte Villa, on the flank of Monte Pellegrino, overhanging the harbour, tearing her clothes and pricking her fingers among the fantastic cacti and agaves, and picking wild crocuses and white alyssom and spurge, the purple flowers of the mandrake and pretty pitcher arums ; which, last, however, she speedily threw away, on account of their rank, unwholesome smell.

There were long rambles also, in the Park of the Favorita, from which she and Rosalia would return

laden with twigs of the graceful pepper tree,* with its tiny greenish flowers and drooping bunches of pink coral berries, and branches of the waxen-flowered arbutus, with beautiful strawberry fruit.

Another day, she was taken to see the Favorita Palace itself, with its Chinese pagoda, and quaint, Oriental decorations, encircled by the stiffest of gardens, with prim beds of the pink and yellow-flowered mysembryanthemum, which you will see everywhere in Sicily, not only covering walls and banks, but doing duty as turf of a very Brobdingnagian description. More than once, too, Signor Altovito took the little girls to see the orange-gathering in the gardens near the town; and they would look and wonder at the swift dexterity with which the women, employed in the work, sorted the golden fruit according to its quality; choosing the best for exportation to America and Russia, the second-best for the Italian and English markets, and the worst for home consumption.

What quantities of questions Lina used to be-

* *Schinus molle*.

siege her uncle with ; and how astonished she was, to learn that all the boxes used for packing the oranges were made of ash wood, brought all the way from Canada, in sheaves, technically called *shukes* ; that being the cheapest way of procuring the material !

Then they would weary of standing still and talking ; and off they would run, like little mad things, playing at ball with the windfalls, and picking the delicate, fragrant, yellow flowers of the sorrel (*oxalis lybica*), which is always grown for fodder in these orange-gardens, where it flourishes in the shade of the trees, and makes a soft, lovely carpet of tender green.

Then, what merry chatterings in the evening, in the pretty yellow drawing-room, by the side of Aunt Caroline's sofa, before they were off to bed, to sleep like tops, and be up again early the next morning, full of life and health, and eager for all the simple enjoyments the day was sure to bring !

You must not suppose, however, that these happy children did nothing but play ; had it been so, they would not have enjoyed their fun half as well.

After the first weeks given up to sight-seeing, they always had three hours of steady work with a governess ; and Mrs. Gerard began to give Rosalia lessons in English, Aunt Caroline, having become so thoroughly Italianised by her long residence in Sicily, that she seldom spoke her native language at all. Rosalia could only speak a few words with a strong foreign accent.

Lina, on the contrary, knew both languages exceedingly well, spoke Italian like a Florentine, and English as though she had lived in England all her life, so she, too, gave Rosalia lessons, receiving, in return, a good deal of instruction in the mysteries of the Sicilian dialect.

One lovely morning, when the two girls were hard at work, Lina busy with a complicated division sum, Rosalia poring over the map of Russia, Signor Altovito's head appeared in the doorway, and his smile was so significant as the children looked up from their task, that they guessed something pleasant was coming, and were hardly at all surprised to hear him say :

"Come, children, if you don't particularly want to do all your lessons, you may run and put on your hats. It is Ciccio's half-holiday to-day, and it is so bright and warm that I am going to fetch him from school an hour earlier, in order to take you all to Mondello, to pick up shells and pic-nic on the beach."

He was not obliged to repeat the welcome words. In a trice the lesson-books, and copies, and slates were scuffled into the cupboard without the slightest regard for those principles of order which the governess was always trying to teach her pupils; and before Uncle Pasquale had turned the corner of the Piazza, on his way to Ciccio's school, the little girls had put on their sailor-hats and jackets, provided themselves with baskets for the shells, and were already impatiently expecting his return.

Lina had often asked when they were going to that lovely little bay she had seen from the steamer; but at first there had been so many other things to see; and then a spell of stormy weather had caused the excursion to be put off.

"A real pic-nic!" exclaimed Lina, dancing up and down the pillared antechamber, "how very, very nice! Fancy, Rosalia! I have only been to one pic-nic in my whole life; that was last year. Some English friends of mamma's took me, and we drove for miles and miles up hill—and it was, oh, so dusty! but such fun—till we came to a great big park, called, Pratulino, and we ate our lunch under the trees and ran about and enjoyed ourselves; but I know I shall like Mondello ten times better, because of the sea and the shells. How jolly, how jolly!" and, so saying, Lina seized her cousin round the waist and galloped across the room with her.

"What is best of all," said Rosalia, stopping to take breath, "is that we are all going, every one of us, even dear mamma; for she says she feels quite strong to-day; so I shall really and thoroughly enjoy myself. It takes away half the pleasure of our drives, you know, Lina," the child went on in a low earnest tone, and with tears in her eyes, "when I know all the time that she is lying on her sofa in

the silent house, longing for us all to come back again, and with no one but Alfonsa to keep her company and see that she has all she wants."

"Poor Aunt Caroline! it is a pity!" remarked Lina, sympathetically, "and," she added, "it seems so odd for mammas to be ill instead of little girls. My mamma is never ill; I don't know what I should do if she were." But now it was time to start, and all Lina's grave surmises vanished in the joyful bustle of departure. You may imagine what a happy carriageful they were as they drove through the long avenue of pepper trees in the Favorita Park, at the base of Monte Pellegrino! There was Uncle Pasquale on the box by the side of the coachman, with a big basket of provisions at his feet, and Mrs. Gerard and Aunt Caroline inside, with the three children opposite to them; fat little Ciccio had to do bodkin between the two girls, but was too glad to have escaped an hour's Latin to think of fidgetting at being squeezed. Lina did nothing but talk and think of shells, and actually did not even once ask to get out and pick flowers

as they passed through the open meadows beyond the park.

How beautiful the sea looked as they turned the corner of rugged Pellegrino and came in full sight of the enchanting bay that lies in the open space between that mountain and the cliffs of Capo di Gallo!

"Now we can get out!" shouted Lina, as they came to the sandy road bordered by the royal fish preserves, and all the beach lay before them; but she had to restrain her impatience till they reached a point nearer the village, where there was a nice shady place on the sand, among the arbutus and oleander scrub, where Aunt Caroline could lie down and rest and the lunch be set out.

"But we needn't eat immediately, need we, uncle?" asked Lina, with a very earnest face "we are none of us a bit hungry; *do* let us pick up some shells first!"

"Speak for yourself, Lina!" exclaimed Ciccio, who had already peeped into the well-stocked basket. "It's all very well for you who have had a jolly

breakfast at home not to be hungry, but when a fellow has had nothing but a hunk of dry bread and weak coffee——”

“There, take that!” said his father, laughing, giving him a sesame-sprinkled roll;” be off with the girls to the shore, and mind you come back directly I give the signal that lunch is ready.” Away floundered the children through the loose sand, up and down hillocks and over tussocks of coarse sand-grass, and never stopped till they reached the big bank of black sea-weed thrown up by the sea during the recent storms.

There stretched before them the beautiful sea, not blue as at Palermo, but of a rich emerald colour where the water deepened, and in-shore of wonderful malachite tints, with black splashes here and there when dark weed-covered rocks lay near the surface. To the left was the picturesque, scattered village of Mondello and a long rocky tower-crowned promontory, beyond which were the beetling crags of Capo di Gallo.

The morning breeze was cresting the emerald

wavelets with tiny sprays of foam ; white and brown-sailed fishing boats were putting off from the village. In the distance larger vessels were gliding swiftly over the water, like huge white birds with outspread wings, and one or two steamers were leaving long trails of smoke far in their wake. Lina gave just one glance to all this beauty, and then with a cry of delight stooped down to search for the promised treasures of the beach.

What were all those pinky curves on the sand, just where the water touched the shore ? Why, it was the coral, or rather coralline, the captain of the steamboat had told her about. At this first glance, though, the shells did not appear to be plentiful.

"I don't see many shells!" she exclaimed with some disappointment in her voice.

"Did you expect to see great Indian ones like those in the museum, lying about all ready tick-eted ?" asked Ciccio, as sarcastically as was possible, with his mouth crammed full of bread.

"The beach is all shells, Lina, dear," said Rosalia, who was sitting down busily groping in the sand.

"Look here!" and she held up for Lina's inspection a handful of tiny shells, of the most delicate shapes and colours, mixed with fragments of pink and white coralline.

"Oh! oh!! oh!!!" was all Lina could say, and down she threw herself by Rosalia's side, instantly absorbed in the dear delight of shell-gathering.

Ciccio, too, when he had quite finished his bread, set to work in the same way, but his tastes were on a larger scale. He cared only for the big ormers, and doves, and scallops, and cockles, the dried star-fish, and trails of seaweed, encrusted with coralline and sea-sponges, and curious soft olive-green balls, of which there were great quantities. However, he soon wearied of making this collection and amused himself by walking on the extreme edge of the ledge of sand, pushed up by the waves, which of course gave way at nearly every step, and enabled him to get his feet delightfully wet in an extremely short time. He was just meditating taking off his shoes and stockings and marching straight into the water, when Mrs. Gerard came across the sands to

summon the children to lunch. Both girls were so occupied in their shell-hunt, that they gave a great start when they heard her voice close behind them.

Lina quickly jumped up, holding a handful of tiny treasures. "See, mamma ! how many dear little shells I have found ; and Rosalia is so kind, she gives me all her prettiest ones. Do look at these little glass shells. They are just like air-bubbles ; and Rosalia says they are called "bulle ;" and these wee, wee ones, like grains of rice ; and these little horns like fairy trumpets !"

"They are indeed pretty," said Mrs. Gerard ; "but now you must come to luncheon ; we are all very hungry."

"I'm not, mamma !" said Lina, "I have no time to feel hungry with all these sweet little shells waiting to be picked up."

"But I am, though," said Ciccio "and I have got plenty of shells already, a great deal better than Lina's."

"You dreadful little boy ! how wet your feet

are!" said Mrs. Gerard, shocked at the dripping state of her nephew's fat legs.

"What's the use of coming on the beach, if you keep your feet dry, Aunty?" pleaded Ciccio with a comical look. "They'll be quite dry by the time we have done lunch. Now I'll bet you all my shells, girls, that I get there first," and off he dashed; and, having a good start, was already seated on the sand by his mother's side, with a goodly portion of galantine in his lap, by the time the girls appeared flushed and panting from their race over the sands.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE PASQUALE TRIES TO TELL A FAIRY
TALE.

I NEED not tell you that they were an uncommonly merry party. The fresh sea-air had brought quite a colour into Aunt Caroline's pale cheeks ; and it was pretty to see how tenderly the little girls, and Ciccio, too (as soon as his desperate hunger was satisfied), hovered about her, bringing dainty little slices of chicken and other delicacies, to tempt her to eat "just another bit," and filling up her glass till she laughingly bade them stop. Uncle Pasquale, merrier than ever in the rare enjoyment of having his wife with him, told the children all sorts of funny stories, that sent even grave, careworn Mrs. Gerard into convulsions of laughter.

"I do think this is the very prettiest place in the

world, uncle!" exclaimed Lina, with heartfelt enthusiasm, as she helped Rosalia to pack the empty plates and dishes in the basket. "How nice it would be to have a little house here, and live in it all our lives!"

"It would be rather stupid without any other fellows to play with," remarked Ciccio, draining the wine left in his father's tumbler, as the most satisfactory way of getting rid of its contents before replacing it in the basket.

"Oh! but our friends should have houses here too," continued Lina; "all your favourite school-mates, Ciccio, and your cousins, and my dear sister Emily, and Uncle George, too, if he liked to come, and all my friends from Florence. Oh, how happy we should be! We would climb up the mountains, and gather wild flowers, and pick up shells, and do nothing but amuse ourselves from morning till night."

"But on wet days, Lina, what would you do? Don't you think we should want some lesson-books then?" inquired practical Rosalia.

"Certainly not!" answered Lina, promptly, "we should have our dolls to dress, you know, and our shells to arrange in little boxes, and our flowers to dry. We might have just a few fairy tales; but I am sure we should never want any other books."

"What a bright world this would be if life were like these happy child-dreams," said Mrs. Gerard, in a mournful tone, stroking Lina's rebellious curls.

"And so it is bright," said Uncle Pasquale, who would never look at things on the gloomy side, "with all these dear children round us."

"Yes," said Mrs. Gerard, with a tearful smile, looking round the group; "but you must remember I have only one of my darlings here."

"Poor Maria!" said Aunt Caroline, tenderly pressing her sister's hand between her thin, wasted fingers, "it is hard for you; still you know that your Emily is happy and well cared for."

"Why don't you write to your brother-in-law?" asked Signor Altovito, "and tell him to bring Emily over here for her Christmas holidays? It is nothing of a journey for you travel-loving English."

At this, in spite of her sadness, Mrs. Gerard fairly burst out laughing. The notion of that prim, conventional, foreigner-hating, old bachelor brother-in-law ever coming to Sicily was too comical.

"Yes, do, mamma, dear!" said Lina, throwing her arms round her mother's neck; and "Do, do, Aunt Maria!" echoed Rosalia and Ciccio, suddenly inspired with the strongest desire to see their big cousin Emily.

"I tell you what; if you won't write, I will," said Uncle Pasquale; "I'll send Signor George a long letter of invitation in my very best Sicilian English, and Rosalia must turn your lessons to account by correcting all my blunders."

"It is no use talking of such a thing," replied Mrs. Gerard, shaking her head decisively; "and now if you will take the children for a run along the shore, Caroline and I will stay quietly here and enjoy the beautiful view and the sea-breeze until it is time to think of going home."

"Don't talk of going home yet," screamed the

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children in chorus, and clustering round good-natured Signor Altovito, who, like a true Italian, was never so happy as when making children happier, they were soon out of sight among the ridges and hillocks of sand.

Soon they came to a patch of beach, sprinkled with shells, still more beautiful and varied than those they had found before ; and while the girls were busily collecting them, Uncle Pasquale seated himself on a heap of seaweed by their side, smoked a cigar, and helped Ciccio to build a magnificent sand-castle, guarded by a mighty wall of seaweed, and fortified by mussel and oyster shells.

"But where do all these beauties come from?" asked Lina, getting up to stretch herself, being quite stiff from crouching so long on the sand.

"What a silly question, Cousin Lina! From the bottom of the sea, of course," said matter-of-fact Ciccio, planting a waving pennon of feathery weed on the summit of his tower.

"But they are so very, very tiny, not like shells in other places ; they really must be fairy shells."

"Quite right," said Uncle Pasquale, very gravely. "Would you like me to tell you how they come here?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the children; and Rosalia whispered confidentially to Lina that papa sometimes told them very nice fairy tales.

"Well, then, if you'll all promise to listen attentively—Ciccio, don't fidget, but sit there;" and so saying, he lifted up that active little boy, and popped him down exactly on top of the sand-castle, rather to the detriment of that building, which had not been constructed to bear such heavy weights.

"You must know, then," he began, in an impressive tone, "that among the tall grass over there, at the foot of those trees, there dwells a tribe of strange little fairies, who are as much at home in the water as on land. They inhabit holes in the sand, and they live chiefly on wild fruits. They can fly like butterflies, swim like fish, and dive like ducks. There are not as many of them as there used to be in old times, because they are very mischievous and quarrelsome, and never at

peace with the land fairies, excepting when at war with the water ones ; but they are so clever and cunning that they manage to make mischief among their many enemies, and so are never attacked by them all at once, or they would long ago have been exterminated."

"Have you ever seen any of them ?" interrupted Lina, eagerly.

"Not myself ; but my great-grandfather's second cousin's aunt once saw one that had been caught in a birdsnare by her brother-in-law's great nephew."

"And pray what was it like ?" put in Ciccio.

"I'll tell you as soon as you have found out what relation was the person who caught it to my great-grandfather and to you," answered his father promptly ; and now no more interruptions, please, or you'll make me forget the whole story.

"These mischievous little fairies are allies of the wicked tribe of sharks and sword-fish, who are such cruel devourers and oppressors of the small fish under the protection of the gentle water fairies, and so the sharks send them word whenever the

king of the water fairies, who holds his court under the waters of this bay, has marched off with his armies on some distant expedition.

"Thereupon they seize the opportunity, and diving down to his beautiful realms, frighten to death the poor little baby-fairies and their mammas who have been left at home, and do all the mischief they possibly can in a single night. They ravage the palaces and gardens, destroy the bowers of seaweed and coral, and tear up the beautiful shell-mosaic pavements, and fill great bags with their spoil, which their accomplices, the sharks, bring to the shore in their mouths and scatter about on the beach.

"All this they do from sheer malice, for they have no use for what they take. Then, when they are safely back here on the sands, where the water fairies have no power over them, they have mad dances by moonlight on the beach, shovel up the seaweed into great mounds and banks, and pelt each other with these olive-green balls you see lying about. At the first rays of dawn, however,

before any human beings are passing this way, they have all scuttled into their holes in the sand, among the bushes, and fishermen wonder why the beach is in so strange a state when no wind has been blowing during the night. You may imagine the grief and rage of the good, kind little water fairies when they find their beautiful dwellings all ruined and desolate, their wives and children crying among the ruins. But they have no power on land. All they can do is to prevent their enemies keeping their useless spoils, and this is how they manage it. They persuade their lord and protector, Father Neptune, to send an army of sea-horses to overrun the beach ; and if you could come here some stormy night, perhaps you might see the great white horses dashing on to the shore, with myriads of tiny water fairies perched on their foaming crests, rolling, rolling, rolling over these sands and washing away all the delicate little shells and coral branches of which they had been robbed. However, the beach fairies don't care much for that. They are snugly hidden in the sand up there among the bushes, and

it is only now and then that some very daring sea-horse dashes right on to the entrance to their dwellings. Whenever that happens, the cunning little things, who keep a good look-out, make haste to fly up into the trees, and even take refuge in birds' nests. To this the birds object a good deal, and occasionally gobble up a few of the intruders, but not often, for they have learnt to their cost that these beach fairies have it in their power to make things very unpleasant for the young birds who cannot fly. They know, too, by experience, that if they refuse refuge to the fairies when the sea-horses are out, that it will be a long time before they will be able to leave their nests to go in search of food ; that for every fairy some irritable mother-bird may have gobbled up in indignation at the invasion of her privacy, so many eggs will be sucked and broken ; there will be a scarcity of birds for at least a whole season."

"Is that all ?" asked Rosalia, in a disappointed voice, as her father left off speaking and proceeded to light a cigar.

"Yes, that's all," answered he. "Don't you like my story?"

"Yes, very much, dear papa; but——" hesitated Rosalia.

"But it isn't a regular story," broke in Ciccio. "It's only a description. It would have been much nicer to hear what some particular beach fairy did, instead of what they all do."

Signor Altovito held up his hands deprecatingly. "I didn't know that I had so critical an audience," he said. "Next time I'll try and tell you the whole life and adventures of some particular fairy, or I see I shan't be able to please you."

"I like your story very much, uncle," said Lina, nestling up to his side. "It is very, very pretty. How I should like to see the water fairies riding on the crests of the waves! but somehow I can't be very angry with those naughty beach fairies after all, since it is they who fetch up all the darling shells from the bottom of the sea."

"I never said my story was true, Lina," said Uncle Pasquale, bending down to kiss the little girl.

Then they wandered along the beach, not without a good romp by the way, and through the straggling village, across the little piazza, where brown fishing-nets were drying in the sun, and over the rocks up to the little watch-tower at the end of the promontory. There they scrambled about for some time. Ciccio nearly fell into the sea in a vain attempt to catch a goat that kept skipping higher and higher, and all were very sorry when the glowing tints of the western sky warned them that it was getting late for Aunt Caroline to be out, and that they must hurry back to Palermo with all possible speed.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET.

LESSONS were over for the day, and with a wide flapping hat on her head, to protect her from the rays of the sun, which still, at the latter end of November, blazes with tropical fierceness in this southern isle, little Lina stood all by herself on the roof-terrace of her uncle's house, leaning over the parapet, and gazing vacantly at the blue sea. Apparently, something had gone wrong with our little heroine's temper, for the corners of her mouth were turned down instead of up, and every now and then she impatiently stamped her foot on the glazed tiles. Her cherished doll was evidently in disgrace, for there it stood, only half-dressed, propped up in a far-off corner, its pretty simpering face turned to the wall.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" exclaimed Lina, presently, "what a long time Rosalia is stopping in Uncle Pasquale's room; I wonder why he wouldn't let me come in too? It's a great shame! he never shut me out before, and I am sure I haven't been naughty. I do hate people to have secrets. I never have any from Rosalia, and it is so nasty to be up here all by myself. Mamma is writing letters in aunt's room, so I can't go to her, and the doll is naughty, and the rabbits stupider than ever. Oh, I do wish Rosalia would come and play with me." And, thereupon, Lina gave another stamp with her foot, and two big tears of vexation and self pity rolled down her sunburnt cheeks. Just then, hearing footsteps on the stairs, she rushed across the terrace to see if it were her cousin. No! it was only Alfonsa, with the coffee-mill under her arm, coming to grind the next day's supply out in the warm sunshine.

"What's the matter, signorina?" asked the old servant, noticing Lina's woe-begone face.

"Oh, nothing!" said the child, pettishly, shrugging

her shoulders ; "but I am waiting for Rosalia, and she is *such* a long time."

"And you all alone, Poverina !" said old Alfonsa, very pityingly, for she had the true southern detestation of solitude. "That is dreadful ; shall I let you grind some of the coffee ?"

"Oh yes, please do !" said Lina, brightening up, and, seizing the mill, she began to turn the handle as vigorously as she could, while Alfonsa, with her arms tucked under her apron, stood by her side, enjoying the pleasures of idleness and gossiping about all sorts of things in her rapid Sicilian, which, by this time, Lina understood very fairly.

"And my niece is going to be married next month," she went on, after having given Lina a complete sketch of her family history ; "and she may thank me that she can marry so soon, for I am going to give her a good lump of my savings, and all the things I bought years ago for my own wedding."

"How is it you are not married then, Alfonsa ?" inquired Lina, much interested, and pausing from her labour, to rest her aching arm.

"Ah! that's a sad story!" said the old woman, shaking her head and heaving a deep sigh. "We had been engaged a long time, and my Doro had bought a good bit of furniture, and I had got all our house-linen—for you know, signorina, we Sicilians never marry till we have enough things to set up housekeeping properly—when he had to go and be a soldier again, though he had nearly served out all his time before; and he got a bad fever, and when he did come back at last, he was a dying man; and so I never married after all."

Lina looked up at her pityingly, but remained silent. She never could say anything when she felt very sorry; then, after a pause, anxious to get back to more cheerful subjects, she said:

"And so you are going to give all your things to your niece. How pleased she must be!"

"Ay! that she is, for she is a good girl, but, Dio Buono! there's nothing like relations for ingratitude. Her mother says it's a shame I didn't give the things to the other girl who turned nun a few years ago, and then she might have got a

husband too; but it isn't true, signorina, for Filomena was a born nun, if ever there was one, even at your age, and she's as happy as the day is long. I often see her sitting at the window and fanning herself just like a lady, when I pass the convent. Signorina Lia knows her, for she sometimes goes with me, when I run in to have a chat with her at the grating."

"Couldn't you take me one day, dear Alfonsa?" asked Lina, coaxingly, "I should so like to talk to a real nun."

Alfonsa was much flattered at the request. "Nothing easier," she said, for the nuns at Palermo were not boxed up as closely as she heard they were in other parts. The very next Sunday she would take her if the Signora Mamma would allow it; and Lina began to think how nice it would be, if, for once, she could exchange the long church service at the Consulate—where the glimpse she had from her seat of the bright sea and waving trees outside always made it so hard to attend to the sermon—for a peep at the unknown convent-world.

"And I tell you what, signorina!" said Alfonsa, with the air of one bestowing an enormous favour. "As that mischievous little Ciccio is not here to play any pranks when my back is turned, and you have nothing to amuse you, I'll show you some of the things I am going to give to my niece. I keep them in my closet downstairs."

Up jumped Lina, upsetting, in her eagerness, all the coffee that remained unground; and old Alfonsa, taking a ponderous key out of her pocket, waddled down the stairs and through the kitchen, with its rows of shining copper pans, into her own stuffy little bed-room, of which the window was very rarely opened.

She was in high delight at Lina's exclamation of astonishment, as the opening of the closet door revealed a very motley collection of goods and chattels. On one shelf were piles of homespun sheets and pillow-cases, tied up with pink ribbons; some of them—as Alfonsa proudly pointed out—with wide embroidered borders; for Italians, even of the humblest class, will make any sacrifice to

possess expensive bed-linen. There was plenty of unbleached table-cloths too, and a great array of common crockery, several coffee-pots, a great many coloured prints of saints in tinselled frames, pots and pans, brilliant trays, half a dozen chairs bottomed with the strong white fibre of the aloe, stacked one on top of the other, common glass vases, brass lamps and candlesticks, and many other miscellaneous articles.

"How did you ever get such quantities of things, Alfonsa?" asked Lina admiringly.

"I bought them all myself, signorina, every one ; and ever since I knew I should never want them for a house of my own, I have gone on buying little things that were good bargains from time to time. It's a sort of habit." And something like a tear rolled down the woman's wrinkled cheek, as she dusted a looking-glass with her apron.

"It's very nice for your niece" remarked Lina, standing on tiptoe, to inspect an impossible landscape on one of the trays.

"Yes, signorina ; and it is I who gave her the money to buy her four mattresses."

"Why does she want so many?" inquired Lina laughing.

"Signorina!" and Alfonsa held up her hand in dismay at the child's ignorance of matrimonial matters. "What man would marry a girl who did not bring him four mattresses? He has to buy the bedstead, you know, and the chest of drawers, and the tables, and other household matters."

"Lina! Lina!" cried Rosalia's sweet voice from the terrace above; and with a joyful—"Have you come at last, Rosalia!" and hastily thanking Alfonsa for the sight of her treasures, the child darted away to join her cousin, who was waiting for her on the terrace, ready dressed to go out. But though Lina had recovered her temper, she was still very anxious to find out why Rosalia had been so mysteriously closeted with her father for more than an hour. Not a word would Rosalia say on the subject, but there was a certain importance

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in her manner that convinced sharp-eyed Lina that there was indeed a great mystery going on about something. Uncle Pasquale, too, kept smiling to himself, and every now and then gave a significant glance to his daughter, as he walked through the streets with the little girls, in a way that made Lina feel more inquisitive than ever. So much perplexed was she by all this, that, in crossing the Piazza de Bologni, she quite forgot to laugh as usual at the toga-draped statue of Charles V. in the centre of the square. That meagre, hungry looking monarch, laurel-crowned, and with outstretched hand, really seems, when seen from one corner of the Piazza, to have only one leg, and to be in the act of asking charity. Lina had made her uncle laugh very heartily the first time she saw this statue, by insisting that it must be one of a lame beggar, and that she could fancy she could hear the whine, "*Date qualcosa al povero zoppo*" (Give to the poor lame), issuing from those pinched, bronze lips.

Ever since it had been a standing joke of her

uncle's always to ask her why she gave nothing to the poor lame beggar.

"You are very serious to-day," he said, looking kindly at her. "I think I must take you to buy some sweets to brighten you up."

"Oh, yes! do, papa!" put in Rosalia; "please take us to the pretty shop we both like so much, where we bought the sugar-lambs."

"That is on the way home; and I don't want Lina to be silent all the time she is out. No! we will go to that lemonade-stall in Via Macqueda, on the way to the English Garden, and get some of that *pietra femola* Lina was so anxious to taste."

"Thank you, uncle," said Lina, looking down in a shamefaced way. "I am not cross now; but it was so stupid without Rosalia to play with me, and—and——"

"And you wanted to know what she was doing in my room, didn't you, little one? Rosalia and I have a little secret together."

Lina hoped he was going to tell her what it was, but he said no more on the subject; and soon they

were standing before the smartest of all the pretty lemonade-shops in Palermo, at which Lina had often shot longing glances in driving past it to the English Garden. This entrancing place is very small, rather a stall than a shop; but then it is fashioned like the front of a temple, and brilliant with profuse red paint and gilding. Five small globes of gold fish, and as many silver balls, swing from its roof; piles of lemons and oranges, saucers of powdered sugar, glasses and spoons, are temptingly arranged on the marble counter. At one corner are small decanters of anisetto and other *liqueurs*; at the other is a huge pile of a black, sticky-looking compound—the delicacy Lina is in search of. More lemons, freshly gathered, as you may see by the glossy leaves on their stalks, are in reserve on the narrow shelves in the background. From one of the pillars an everlasting runlet of pure, fresh water trickles into the marble basin beneath.

“Now, children, if you are going to eat much of this sweetstuff,” said Uncle Pasquale, handing to

each little girl a big, square lump of *pietra femola*, "you had better have something to drink. Will you have water alone, or water with a dash of anisetto in it, or some lemonade?"

Of course they both chose lemonade: it was not only the nicest to drink, but it was also such fun to see the fresh lemons squeezed into the water, and the sugar stirred in, and then the beverage tossed rapidly backwards and forwards half a dozen times from one big tumbler to another, so that the fragrant juice, the sugar, and the water might be thoroughly mixed and acquire the true flavour.

"What do you think, Lina!" said Rosalia, presently, when sweets and lemonade had been satisfactorily disposed of. "Papa says that if it is fine next Thursday he will give us another whole holiday, and take us up Monte Pellegrino to Santa Rosalia's cave. That'll be nicer even than Mondello, won't it?"

"Not nicer! there is nothing in the world so nice as picking up shells," replied Lina, clasping her hands in an impressive manner; "but it will be

capital fun. Shall we really go on donkeys, Uncle Pasquale?"

"Really on donkeys, even your mamma and I," he answered; "but don't think too much about it, for the weather may change, and you little girls would be blown to bits on the top of the mountain on a windy day. You know the great statue of Santa Rosalia that you saw from the sea has had two heads blown off already. It would never do for such an accident to befall my little girls."

But Lina could think of nothing but the donkeys, and kept speculating all the way home whether her grave mamma would ever be persuaded to mount one. There was nothing astonishing in the idea of merry Uncle Pasquale on a donkey; but mamma!

Lina, like many other little girls, found it very difficult to realize that, once upon a time, her mamma might actually have been a child like herself.

As they were running upstairs to take off their things, Lina suddenly whispered in Rosalia's ear:

"Was that the secret? About Monte Pellegrino?"

"No! it wasn't, you inquisitive little thing!"

"I'm not inquisitive," pouted Lina, tugging at her hat-strings, "but oh, I do so want to know!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SANTA ROSALIA.

NEVER before had Lina bestowed so much attention on the state of the weather as during the days preceding the Thursday destined for the excursion to the summit of Monte Pellegrino. Nearly all her play hours were spent upon the roof terrace, and if she saw a cloud the size of your hand hovering anywhere over the ring of mountain peaks that bounded her view landwards, down she would rush to summon her uncle to come up and give her his opinion on the phenomenon. "Did he think it meant rain, or wind, or both? Or was it a storm coming on?" and fifty other questions of the same sort.

What despair she was in when, on Wednesday morning, she beheld a great nightcap of mist surrounding the top of Monte Acuto, and a similar

one settling down on Monte Pellegrino itself. She appealed in turn to every member of the household to know what chance there might be of the weather clearing before ten o'clock the next morning ; but, alas ! Uncle Pasquale shook his head and held out very little hope. If the wind changed the threatening clouds and mists might be blown away, but if not, why, Lina must wait till the following week to see Santa Rosalia's shrine.

So the excitable child went about the house with a very long face all the morning, but in the afternoon her hopes revived, for the sun had come out and the mists dispersed.

"It won't rain, it won't rain !" she kept shouting. "We shall really go to-morrow, after all, mamma !"

"It is to be hoped that we shall," answered her mother ; "for indeed, Lina, this Monte Pellegrino fever of yours is driving us all crazy. I should like to see my little girl learning to be more reasonable."

"But it is so hard to be reasonable, mammina darling, when one is very, very anxious about anything," answered Lina, throwing her arms round

Mrs. Gerard's neck, and giving her a terribly vigorous hug.

That night my little heroine stayed awake so late, thinking about how very early she would get up to study the weather, that when the morning came she overslept herself, and never opened her eyes till Rosalia was quite dressed.

"Is it fine, is it fine?" she cried, instantly bouncing out of bed and pattering over the tiled floor, with naked feet, to go and look out of window.

"Lina, Lina! put on your slippers," remonstrated motherly Rosalia. "See! it is a lovely morning," and, drawing aside the thick green curtain, a flood of warm sunlight poured into the room, illuminating the eager little white-robed creature in the middle of the floor, and turning her tangled locks into a gold-brown glory round her head. Under the circumstances, it is not much to be wondered at if Lina's toilet was a very hurried performance that morning, and her appearance far from neat when, her clothes tumbled on anyhow, she scampered into the breakfast-room.

"My dear," said Uncle Pasquale, in a solemn tone, and looking at her with a mischievous twinkle in his kind, black eyes, as he twisted one of her shaggy, ill-combed locks round his finger, "it is easy to see that you are suffering from donkeys on the brain. That complaint always makes the hair rough."

What was worse, too, than being laughed at, her mamma looked grave and displeased with her little daughter, and disregarding all entreaties, instantly carried her off to do her hair properly.

These grievances were, however, quickly forgotten, and an hour later the whole party was assembled at the foot of the mountain, where donkeys and donkey boys were waiting to convey them up the steep paved ascent. What fun the mounting was, and what a deal of arrangement the ramshackle saddles and stirrups required! There was Uncle Pasquale, looking extremely dignified, on a good-sized mule which Ciccio had secretly hoped would be given to himself instead of the smallest, which naturally fell to his share. Equally, of course,

Mrs. Gerard had the biggest and strongest donkey. Rosalia had a sleek brown one; Lina a dappled. As the latter was the first to be mounted, she thought she would like to career about a little on the grass by herself while the others were getting ready; but, alas! she soon found that it is easier to mount a donkey than to manage him. Naturally, the cunning little animal, well aware of the hard day's work before him, steadily refused to move.

"He won't go, mamma," screamed poor Lina, tugging at and shaking her reins in all sorts of ways. "I'm sure he has a very bad disposition."

But when a smart blow from one of the boys did at last make him go, Lina found it by no means so delightful as she had anticipated, for the animal set off at a rapid jolting pace that nearly jerked her out of the saddle, and then stopped quite suddenly, with his legs immoveably planted as before.

However, at last they were all off. Uncle Pasquale and mamma in front; then the two little

girls ; and Ciccio, with his short legs stuck straight out, a little distance behind. Slow enough was their progress up the slippery zigzag causeway ; the poor animals slipping, sliding, and stumbling at every second step.

“Uncle Pasquale !” cried, presently, the irrepressible Lina, “you know you promised to tell us the whole story of Santa Rosalia on the way.”

“Have a little pity, my dear child,” panted her uncle, whose rotten saddle-girths were slipping round in a very uncomfortable manner. “I promise you that I’ll gratify your thirst for information when we are safely at the top.”

“Oh dear ! oh dear !” exclaimed tender-hearted Rosalia, as her animal went down on its knees with a jerk that popped her on the ground, “I’m sure my poor donkey is too weak to carry me. I think I had better walk.”

“Mine goes beautifully now !” said Lina, triumphantly ; but hardly had she said the words before some strap broke, and her saddle slipped right back to the creature’s tail.

"Oh! oh! oh! I'll walk too," cried she, hurriedly scrambling down.

"How easily frightened you girls are!" said Ciccio. I'm all right,"

A minute later his donkey's four legs were slipping in four different directions, and there was master Ciccio with his legs in the air and his arms tightly clasped round the poor brute's neck.

So, for a while the three children toiled up on foot along the steep winding road, now stopping to take breath, now to look down on the fair city with its belt of gardens, and cactus fields, and the ever-widening view of sea and shore; and then they thought they would mount again, and the guides had to swear a great deal to make the donkeys (who were enjoying their freedom) stand close enough to the low wall for the little girls to get on their backs.

At last, after a great deal more slipping and stumbling, they came up with the others, and reached the place where all were to dismount.

"How nicely you ride, mamma!" exclaimed Lina,

by this time very hot and breathless ; “ your donkey hardly slips at all.”

“ You see, I know how to keep him up,” answered Mrs. Gerard, smiling ; “ but donkey-riding is not to be learnt in one day, Lina.”

“ And now for Santa Rosalia !” cried the child, capering about to get rid of the stiffness in her legs, while they stood before the gloomy-looking convent adjoining the cave waiting for the sacristan, who had the key of the sanctuary.

After crossing an open court overhung by frowning rocks from which water was dripping on all sides, they saw before them a deep, dim cave with a glittering altar and a few twinkling candles.

“ Oh, what a lovely face !” cried Lina, who, as usual, had rushed in first, and with glistening eyes and parted lips stood spell-bound before the iron railing enclosing the marble statue of the virgin saint.

Certainly this beautiful statue well merited our Lina’s admiration.

The girlish figure is stretched full-length ; her beautiful head, crowned with a wreath of golden

roses, is resting on one of her hands ; her delicate features wear an expression of deep repose. She is clothed in a robe of beaten gold chased with flowers. A golden crucifix hangs from her wrist, and a marble cherub is bending over her offering a golden lily.

"You will be pleased to hear, Lina," said Mrs. Gerard, who was turning over the pages of her guide-book, "that this lovely statue is the work of a Florentine sculptor, named Gregorio Tedeschi, who lived in the seventeenth century."

"Those Florentines of yours seem to have had a finger in everything," said Ciccio, with a mischievous twinkle in the direction of his cousin. "They were such a quarrelsome set, they never could live quietly in Florence. I am reading about them at school now, and I see that half of them were always kicking out the other half."

"All the better for you Sicilians," retorted Lina. "See how many beautiful things you have to thank them for. Tell me, uncle," she went on, scrambling up to peep into the tiny cavern above the altar,

"did poor Santa Rosalia really live in that dark little hole?"

"She is supposed to have done so," replied Signor Altovito, "as her remains were found there, but I can't tell you her story in this damp place. Your mamma is shivering already and Ciccio is in mischief as usual."

It was difficult to find a place where that active young gentleman did not get into mischief. In this dripping cave a quantity of tin spouts and troughs are fitted to the rocky ceiling, to catch the perpetually-dropping water; and Ciccio, after several vain attempts to clamber up the side of the cave farthest away from the sacristan's suspicious eye, had managed to catch hold of one of the projecting spouts, swing by it to another, and there he was hanging by his hands swinging vigorously backwards and forwards and enjoying at the same time a miniature shower bath.

So, after Ciccio had been well scolded and all had tasted the ice-cold water of Santa Rosalia's well, they went out into the warm sunshine. The contents

of the luncheon-basket were carried to the most sheltered nook that was to be found on the stony hill-side, and when even Ciccio's appetite was satisfied and the donkey boys made happy by the gift of a bottle of wine and the remains of the feast, Uncle Pasquale called the children round him and announced that he would fulfil his promise of telling them the story of Santa Rosalia.

"Remember," he began, with a smiling glance at the three attentive faces, "I won't vouch for the truth of the legend, but these are the supposed particulars of the saint's life.

"She was born at Palermo in the year 1130, of parents nearly allied to the royal family of Sicily, and boasting a descent from the great Emperor Charlemagne. She is supposed to have been a niece of King Roger, and to have been brought up in the royal palace.

"Yet, though reared in the most luxurious way, at the early age of twelve, determined to dedicate herself to a religious life, and leaving the splendours of the court and the shelter of her father's roof, fled

to the mountain of Quisquina, about forty miles from here ; and there, in a damp and gloomy cave, she passed some years in solitary prayer and penance."

"What a fool she must have been!" burst in Ciccio, unceremoniously. "Fancy, if our Rosalia took it into her head to run away next year!"

"I suppose she thought she was right," answered Rosalia, who did not like her patron saint and namesake to be found fault with, "and perhaps her papa and mamma did not love or need her as much as mine do me. But please go on, papa dear!"

"The story goes," he continued, "that after a while an angel removed her to the cavern you have just seen, and that she lived there till her death, in 1166."

"Why, she was quite old, then!" exclaimed Lina, making a rapid calculation on her fingers. "I thought by that statue that she must have been about fifteen when she died."

"Happy child! I wish I could think thirty-six a great age," said Uncle Pasquale, affecting to groan

heavily ; "but now let me go on with the narrative. She was made a saint immediately after her death, but was not chosen as chief protectress of the city until four or five hundred years afterwards.

"Then, while a fearful pestilence was ravaging the land, and when the virgin martyrs, Santa Ninfa and Santa Cristina, had in vain been prayed to stop it, Santa Rosalia appeared in a vision to a woman sick of the plague, cured her in an instant, and commanded her to visit this cave on Monte Pellegrino. She did so, fell asleep, and the saint again appeared, and pointed out to her the spot where the remains were to be found. After some trouble these were discovered inclosed within a hollow rock, were reverently collected, and consigned to the archbishop. At once the violence of the plague abated, but people beginning to doubt whether the bones were really those of the saint, the disease soon broke out again with redoubled fury. One day, in February, 1625, a citizen of Palermo was wandering about this mountain in great affliction at the recent loss of his wife. Sud-

denly a beautiful maiden appeared before him, saying : ' Fear not : come with me, and I will show thee my grotto,' and with these words she led him to the place where Santa Rosalia's bones had been found. The man tremblingly inquired his guide's name. ' I am Rosalia,' she replied. ' Then, why,' cried he, kneeling at her feet, ' do you allow your native city to be ravaged by the plague ? ' ' Heaven hath so willed it,' replied the saint ; ' but the scourge will be stayed when they end their vain disputes about my bones and carry them in solemn procession throughout the entire city.' She then bade the man make his peace with God and narrate to his confessor all that he had witnessed ; and, telling him that he would die of the plague within four days, she disappeared from his sight. The poor man was taken ill as soon as he reached home, sent for his confessor, made all known to him in the presence of two witnesses, and expired at the time foretold by the saint. All doubts were now at an end. In obedience to her command, the relics were carried in procession to the cathedral and then

through the city, attended by the archbishop, all the clergy, and all the chief personages of Palermo, and the plague ceased from that day. It is in commemoration of that deliverance that the five days' festival Rosalia was chatting about to you, Lina, is held every year, from the 11th to the 16th of July. And, in conclusion, you must all give me a hearty kiss as a reward for repeating all this long story."

The children were delighted with the legend, though Lina was the only one who heard it for the first time, and hastened to show their gratitude by showering on the narrator such energetic kisses and hugs, that he soon had to shake off three pairs of arms to recover his breath. Rosalia wanted Mrs. Gerard to immediately promise that she would stay in Sicily till July expressly to see the grand doings at Santa Rosalia's festival.

"You can't imagine, auntie," she cried enthusiastically, "how grand is the procession! All the streets are crowded; all the balconies draped with gay hangings, and filled with people who scatter

flowers. The clergy wear their most splendid robes, and there is music everywhere. The statue is carried by a number of fishermen—it is their especial privilege—and they bear it along at the same swinging trot with which you see them running for miles, to bring their fish to market from the villages along the coast.”

As it is very, very heavy, they have to stop and rest every few minutes, and when they are quite tired out, a fresh relay takes up the holy burden. Oh! you cannot think how beautiful it all is! Every evening there are splendid fireworks on the Marina, and bands playing, and people dancing, and carriages driving up and down, till long after midnight.

“Couldn’t we stop till then, mamma?” pleaded Lina, looking up coaxingly in her mother’s face. “Rosalia’s birthday is then, you know; it would be so nice to be here!”

Mrs. Gerard shook her head.

“I don’t think a Sicilian summer would do for you, my birdie; and you know it is arranged we are

to go to England in the spring, to see our dear Emily."

"Yes, mamma, and I want to go there very much, but still I would rather stop here. No! I mean I would like to do both. What a pity one can't be in two places at once!" And she looked so perplexed, that they all laughed at her.

"Cheer up, little Lina, who knows! something may, perhaps, happen to make mamma change her mind."

So saying, Signor Altovito exchanged so meaning a look with his daughter, that Lina exclaimed :

"Now, uncle, I know you have some delightful plan in your head about us! Please tell me what it is. Do you think you will stay, mamma?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Gerard, again shaking her head, and looking very surprised; and for a few moments, silence fell on the little group on the hill-side.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LITTLE FRIGHT AND A GREAT ALARM.

SOON they started on foot along a narrow track among the jagged limestone rocks towards the ruined oratory at the edge of the cliff, to see the great headless statue of the saint that serves as a landmark for mariners.

The little girls found quantities of scented lilac crocuses among the scanty herbage growing between the rocks, while Ciccio, who did not care much for flowers, made many vain attempts to catch one of the long-legged sheep that were browsing on the mountain. They looked so tame, and allowed him to come so near, that he was inflamed with an ardent ambition to ride one, but, of course, they always got out of his reach at the

critical moment. Disgusted by these failures, he darted on ahead, and when, a few minutes later, the rest of the party strolled into the ruined chapel, there, to their horror, was master Ciccio standing on his head and clicking his heels together, on top of the crumbling wall, at the extreme edge of the precipice.

The girls screamed, Mrs. Gerard turned pale, while Signor Altovito, briefly bidding the children be quiet, bit his lips and darted forward to rescue the child from his perilous position.

A few rapid strides, brought him to the spot, and in an instant the fool-hardy child was safe in his firm grasp.

"You bad boy! Do you know you would have been killed had you fallen off that wall?" he said sternly, as he set Ciccio down on his feet within the inclosure.

The child looked dazed and startled. "It's all right, papa. I was quite safe," he said, looking his father full in the face. "It was better fun even than being on top of a water tower. But how you

did frighten me ! I thought I was over when you caught hold of me like that."

But his father still looked stern. "You deserved to be frightened, for you alarmed us all terribly. I have a great mind to say you shall never go another excursion with us."

At this terrible threat, Master Ciccio turned away whimpering, and the little girls began to pity and pet him, for, tiresome as they found him sometimes, they never liked him to get a real scolding.

"You mustn't be too angry with him," said Mrs. Gerard aside to her brother-in-law. "Boys will be boys, and an agile little monkey like that never comes to harm. You'll have to make a sailor of him."

"He's always in mischief," replied Signor Altovito, still angrily, "and you know he is poor Caroline's darling. If anything happened to him it would kill her. Mind you say nothing at home of the fright he has given us."

The children had already forgotten all about it and were busily poking about among the ruins, and

regretting that they could not carry away at least one of the rose-crowned heads that lay on the ground at the foot of the broken statue.

"And were they both really blown off?" inquired Lina. "It must indeed be dreadful to be up here in windy weather."

"The first head was shattered by lightning," answered Rosalia; "but I believe the other was really blown off in a great storm."

"Who wants to look at Mount Etna through my glass?" cried Uncle Pasquale, who had taken Mrs. Gerard to the best point for admiring the view, and at his call the children quickly scrambled out from among the ruins. And what a view it was on that glowing afternoon!

They were so high up above the bay, that the biggest ships were mere white dots on its surface. Miles and miles of the grand rocky coast lay mapped out beneath them in a series of bold curves and abrupt indentations. They looked over the craggy headland of Capo Zafferana and the long promontory of Bagaria, so thickly dotted with

white villas, into the beautiful bay of Termini, right away to the city of Cefalù. Lofty distant mountains mingled with the clouds, and far, far away, they could just distinguish, among white clouds, the whiter whiteness of Mount Etna. Ciccio took the longest time to find it out, but at last even he discovered that he was *not* to close the eye he applied to the telescope. There, out at sea, rose up distinctly the islands of Alicudi and Felicudi, and, less distinctly, those Lipari Isles Lina had been so anxious to see.

Turning to the left, when tired of straining her eyes to look at distant Etna, Lina gave a shriek of joy as she saw her beloved Mondello almost at her feet. Beyond it lay the bay of Sferra-cavallo, with its craggy peaks, the tiny Isola delle Femmine, and the long low island of Ustica floating on the horizon.

But now the rough cries of the donkey-boys were to be heard behind them; and the children, reluctantly turning their eyes away from this magnificent panorama, saw the animals coming

along at quick trot in the path leading to the chapel.

Rosalia was indignant : "What nasty, deceitful little creatures !" she exclaimed. "See how fast they can go with those heavy boys on their backs, and when we were on them, they all pretended to be too tired to move. I shall know better than to get down and walk now." And soon the little cavalcade was in motion, but of course the children utterly failed in their attempts to make their obstinate steeds go fast ; and, indeed, when they had re-passed the grotto, and the descent began in earnest, the donkeys slid about too much on the slippery stones for any one even to talk of going quickly. They consoled themselves, however, by a wild race across the level ground at the foot of the mountain, while waiting for the two elders, who, having preferred to walk down, were still far in the rear.

"I need not ask my little ones if they have had a happy day," said Aunt Caroline, rising from her sofa to welcome three merry, dishevelled little

beings who came rushing like a whirlwind into her quiet drawing-room, all talking at once, each anxious to be the first to relate the many pleasures of the day.

"And what have you done with yourself all these hours?" asked Mrs. Gerard, tenderly kissing her sister and sitting down by her side.

"Oh! the day has passed quickly," answered Aunt Caroline, cheerfully, for I have had letters and papers from England to amuse me. There are two for you," she went on, taking from the little table by her side a couple of large blue letters directed in a bold, firm hand, "and one for you, Pasquale," she said, giving a similar one to her husband. "It looks so business-like that I did not open it, but I am quite curious to know its contents; you so seldom get letters from England. "Give it to me," said her husband, briefly, and, strange to say, he never offered to read it to her, but retreated with it to a window on the other side of the room. Rosalia jumped up from her seat at her mother's feet and ran off to the same window.

"Don't tease your father now, Rosalia," said her mother, rather sharply, for she was feeling a little anxious about this mysterious English letter. Rosalia reddened, opened her lips as though about to speak, checked herself, and quietly returned to her former place.

All this took place in much less time than it takes to relate, and at that instant there came a moaning cry from Mrs. Gerard, who had read the first few lines of one of her letters.

"Emily! my poor Emily!" she groaned, crushing both letters in her hand and letting them fall to the ground.

Then in a shaking voice, "I must go to her at once. Is there a steamer to-night, Pasquale? The direct Marseilles one, I mean."

"But what is it? Tell us what has happened?" cried her sister, trembling all over, while Signor Altovito pressed the poor mother's hand and prayed her to be calm.

She is ill, very ill, perhaps dying;" and here poor Mrs. Gerard fairly broke down, and seizing little

terrified Lina in her arms, began to cry and wail as though her heart would break.

Her sister and the children began to cry too, but Signor Altovito remained unaccountably composed. He picked up the crumpled letter, and smoothing it out, said :

“You have not read all the letter ; I know you are alarming yourself most unnecessarily ; let me read it to you.”

It was from Mr. Gerard, and told in his stiff way how Emily had caught a severe cold which had ended in inflammation of the lungs. That was all Mrs. Gerard had read, but it went on : “I deemed it best not to write until all danger was past, and I am happy to now inform you that she is doing as well as possible. Her medical man (one of the most eminent in London) assures me that she is rapidly progressing towards convalescence, and that a sojourn in a warm climate will complete her recovery. It is under debate whether Nice or Mentone will be most beneficial. I will advise you as soon as that point be decided, and will duly

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forward you a cheque to cover all expenses should your maternal anxiety prompt you to satisfy yourself in person of the state of your daughter's health."

"She must be worse than he acknowledges," groaned Mrs. Gerard, "or he never would have suggested that I should go to her. Oh! why did I let my darling go away from me!"

Meanwhile Rosalia had noticed the other letter lying unheeded on the floor, and picking it up, she said, in her gentle, caressing voice: "Why, auntie, here is another letter in the same hand."

Mrs. Gerard snatched it from her, but hesitated before opening it, thinking, "What if it contained worse news than the first!"

It was dated two days later than the other, and, like it, gave in prim, set words the glad news of Emily's continued improvement, but added that circumstances having occurred to change his (Mr. Gerard's) plans, Mrs. Gerard was on no account to leave Palermo before hearing from him again, either by telegram or letter. That was all; but as

bewildered Mrs. Gerard turned the page, hoping to find a postscript, her eyes were cheered by the sight of a few lines in her Emily's hand ; although the fluttering ill-formed, characters well proved the writer's weakness.

"Darling mamma," she read, "don't be anxious about me. I am quite well now, and growing quite fat. Uncle George is a kind old pet, and I love him dearly. By the time we meet you won't believe I have been ill at all. A thousand kisses to you and dear little Lina from

"Your loving child,

"EMILY."

You may be sure Lina's tears quickly dried as she read these words over her mother's shoulder ; and then, the great alarm and anxiety being over, everybody began to talk at once, and speculate as to where Emily would be taken. Aunt Caroline was indignant. "It's just like your brother-in-law's selfishness," she said. "Now we shall have you in a fever of anxiety from morning till night, waiting for the next news."

"You are wrong, my dear," said her husband, briskly. "Take my word for it, Mr. Gerard is only silent about his destination in order to spare Maria all unnecessary worry. Who knows," he continued, hesitatingly, "that he may not come farther south—to Naples for instance?"

Mrs. Gerard, who was resting on the sofa now, very white and worn out from all the emotion she had gone through, sprang up eagerly at these words.

"What reason have you for saying that, Pasquale? Do you think it possible? If it only might be! But no! Mr. Gerard would never think of making so long a journey, I am quite sure."

"Try not to worry yourself any more to night," said Uncle Pasquale, kindly. "For my part, I will trust Mr. Gerard to do what is best. Fancy, if he had written while Emily was seriously ill! What tortures you would have suffered? I think he has behaved beautifully."

"No!" cried Mrs. Gerard, her tears beginning to flow again. "He ought to have sent for me at once.

No mother should be away from her child at such a time. It would have been worth any anxiety to have nursed her through it myself."

Just then Aunt Caroline felt her dress gently pulled, and there behind the sofa crouched little Ciccio, who had been quite forgotten during this scene. His eyes were red, for he too had been crying at the bad news, and he was looking very woe-begone.

"Mamma," he whispered, "I know it is naughty, but I can't help it. I am, oh, so *awfully* hungry, and supper was ready when we came in."

"Poor Ciccio!" replied his mother, patting his rough head. "You are quite right; we shall all be the better for some supper; and if you are a good boy, you shall help Rosalia to take some to your aunt, whom I am going to send to bed immediately."

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING.

"LET me in ! let me in, mamma !" cried Lina, early the next morning, knocking impatiently at her mother's door. "I can't turn the handle ; my hands are full."

Quickly the door opened, and there stood Mrs. Gerard half dressed, and very pale and weary after a sleepless night of anxious thought. "What, no telegram !" she said, in a disappointed tone. "What are you doing, my child, with all those toys ?"

"I'm bringing a few of my things to be packed up, mamma, so as to be ready to start as soon as ever Uncle George sends us word where to go," answered Lina, in a strangled voice, for her chin was pressed down on the tottering pile of treasures contained in her pinafore.

"But, my darling," said Mrs. Gerard, very gently and sadly, "if I have to rush away to Nice, I am afraid I could not take you with me on so hurried a journey in the middle of winter. Your uncle might not like me to bring you with me" (or, she thought to herself, might want to take you also from me). "You would be safe and happy here, my pet, and you know I should return as soon as Emily was quite strong again."

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" cried Lina, in the greatest consternation, her eyes filling with tears, and letting all her toys, including the cherished doll, fall to the ground, as she threw her arms round her mother's neck. "You never, never could leave me behind ; what should I do without you ?"

"It is hard, darling, very hard for me too," said her mother, crying herself, as she kissed away Lina's tears ; "but indeed it will be best."

Lina was still nestling in her mother's lap, sobbing out her sorrow, when Rosalia came into the room carrying a cup of coffee, and with a message from her mother.

"Why, what is the matter, Lina? Have you broken your doll?" she asked, in a tone of concern, proceeding to collect the childish treasures scattered about the floor.

"I don't care for my doll; I don't care for anything," burst out poor Lina, in a passion of sobs. "I only want to go with my mamma, and she says she can't take me. Isn't it dreadful? Do try and persuade her to take me."

But Rosalia did not seem to enter into her cousin's grief as readily as she usually did.

"Leave off crying, dear," she said; "and don't tease poor tired auntie any more. It is time to come to breakfast, and afterwards we'll have a famous game on the terrace."

"You don't seem to care a bit whether I go or stay," said Lina, dolefully, as her cousin drew her out of the room. "I don't believe you love me after all."

"How can you say so, Lina?" answered Rosalia, firing up indignantly. "It is very unkind. Why, if you only knew—I wonder if papa would let me tell you——"

"Tell me what?" broke in Lina, eagerly.

"Oh, nothing in particular," said Rosalia, checking herself; "but take my advice, Lina, and don't fret about being left behind, for you'll see aunt won't go away at all—at least, I don't think she will; and who knows but that something may happen to make her change her mind?"

"What something, Rosalia? Now you must tell me; I am wild to know."

"But you mustn't know," answered Rosalia, incautiously; "for it is quite a secret."

"What, what!" and Lina's eyes flashed with eagerness. "Has it anything to do with *the* secret?"

"What secret? I don't know what you mean?" said Rosalia, feigning great astonishment.

"You do, you do, and you are only teasing me. You *shall* tell me," cried Lina, stamping her foot and looking extremely fierce.

"Surely, you are not quarrelling? Lina, Rosalia! I am astonished at you!" exclaimed Uncle Pasquale, putting his head out of his study door on hearing this unusual sound of wrangling.

Lina hung her head, much abashed, and tears began to steal down her flushed cheeks. It was the very first time Uncle Pasquale had ever looked sternly at her. Rosalia went to him, and, standing on tiptoe, whispered something in his ear.

"Run and see if breakfast is ready," he said aloud, patting his little daughter's head, but at the same time shaking his forefinger in sign of warning; "and you, my little Lina, come in here a minute; I have something to say to you."

Lina's heart went pit-a-pat as she entered the room. What could her uncle have to say to her? Was he going to tell her the secret after all?

Sitting down in his big arm chair, Signor Altovito drew her on to his knee, and Lina glanced round the room and up in his face as eagerly as though she expected to see the secret written there.

"Listen, my little one," he said, in his kind voice, but still gravely: "your mother is in sad anxiety just now, as you know, so you must be a brave, good girl, and not torment her by begging to go

with her. Nothing can be decided till we have fresh news from your Uncle Gerard, but I have good reason to believe that you won't have to say good bye-to dear mamma. Now, give me a kiss. Promise not to worry mamma by one single question, and I'll take you to see one of the prettiest gardens in Palermo this very afternoon."

This, and the mysterious sense of being somehow in Uncle Pasquale's confidence, although he had unaccountably omitted to reveal the secret, was more than sufficient to revive Lina's buoyant spirits, and she ran into breakfast by her uncle's side in the best of tempers with herself and everybody else. My little heroine was uncommonly like an indiarubber ball at this period of her existence. If anything flattened her down, up she bounded higher than ever the next minute; for, as she once remarked in confidence to Rosalia, she didn't understand how any one could be miserable long. That was very uncomfortable, and it was so much easier to be happy.

As there was to be no mail from England that

day, Uncle Pasquale fulfilled his promise to Lina, and took them all to the beautiful Serradifalco garden, in the outskirts of the town. Poor Mrs. Gerard wanted to stay at home lest a telegram should come in her absence, but Uncle Pasquale and Aunt Caroline both insisted on her coming, telling her it would be but a bad preparation for her journey to make herself ill by perpetual watching and waiting for a message that might not arrive for several days.

And now that I want to describe the beauties of this Serradifalco garden that Lina went to see, I hardly know how to set about it. I have said nothing about the Botanic Garden of Palermo, because, although very interesting and full of rare plants and trees, it has a certain family resemblance to botanic gardens in other parts of the world, but this garden has a charm of its own, that is very difficult to put into words. However, the best way to try will be to tell you about all the things that best pleased Lina. No doubt any flower-loving little girl who may happen to read these pages will have often admired

in conservatories, or on mamma's dinner-table, plants of the South American Poinsettia, with its stars of crimson leaves with a tiny greenish blossom in the centre, and will have seen, that each of these plants, has two or three, or at the most, perhaps six or seven, of these stars. She will imagine then how wide Lina opened her eyes, and how she capered with delight at seeing several tall *trees* of this beautiful Poinsettia reaching above the windows of the lofty first floor of the Serradifalco palace, and it would have taken her a very long time to count the deep red stars with which they were laden. Many other new and wonderful flowering trees were there also dotted about on the tall rank grass, which here, as in all hot climates, replaces the velvety turf for which cool England is famous; and the two little girls ran merrily about picking up handfuls of fallen blossoms. A good-natured, wizen-faced old gardener, seeing their love for flowers, said they ought to have some better worth keeping, and quickly gathered for both great bunches of fragrant roses of every shade, from

deepest red to creamy white. There were great hedges of geraniums, and masses of wintry blue plumbago, but these had lost the charm of novelty for our Lina, and she barely glanced at them. Among all these brilliant flowers, it was hard to realize that it was December. There were giant salvias gleaming redly against a background of luxuriant heliotropes, tall daturas with their great white trumpets, bananas with large rose-coloured flowers and stems covered with fruit, and clusters of dates hanging from graceful palm trees. These tropical fruits never ripen at Palermo, only here and there on the southern side of the island. Then there was a group of tall bamboos gently swaying in the soft south wind. Lina, who, until she came to Sicily, had only seen bamboos in the shape of walking-canes, was in ecstasies at their pretty foliage. "I never thought they had leaves at all, mamma," she exclaimed, flourishing a branch the gardener had just given to her. But something more attractive than even these natural treasures still remained to be seen, and the children darted

off to explore the maze. Is there anywhere a child that does not delight in a maze with its spice of fun and mystery—the delicious probability of losing oneself amid its windings, and the triumph of finally discovering the right turn? This Sicilian one, too, was not formed by prim, quick-set hedges like that of Hampton Court, or the baby one in the Kensington Horticultural Garden, but was a real wilderness, in which the little girls would soon have lost themselves in earnest had they not kept close to the heels of their friend the gardener.

“And now for the monk!” cried Rosalia, when, at the extremity of the leafy labyrinth, they found themselves before a tiny rustic hut, and lo and behold, as they approached the threshold, the door flew open, apparently of its own accord, and revealed a white-robed monk, who nodded his head and raised his hand in the act of benediction. Lina started back for an instant, frightened out of her wits.

“What does that strange-looking man mean?” she said. “Is he mad?”

"You goose!" said Rosalia, laughing, "it is only a wooden figure. We tread on the spring that opens the door and sets him moving."

Lina reddened, quite ashamed of having been so easily deceived, but the old gardener consoled her by saying that many a grown-up person had been taken in by that figure; and then he cut them long trails of an exquisite creeper that was growing all about the maze, a thornless smilax, with delicate, pointed, satiny leaves of the tenderest green. These they soon twined round their hats, and the gardener told them how often the fine ladies of Palermo came to beg some of this lovely climbing plant, which grows nowhere else in the neighbourhood, for the decoration of their ball dresses.

"Oh dear!" sighed Lina presently, when, loaded with flowers, the two cousins were making their way through the winding alleys to the spot where they had left the elders of the party. "Oh dear! it is so nasty to think that perhaps in a day or two I shall have to go away from this beautiful Palermo, and from you all, though I do want to

see poor Emily. I wonder whether we shall ever come back again ! Do you think you will miss me much when you are playing with the rabbits up on the terrace ?” And Lina wiped her eyes and gave a pathetic little sniff.

“Of course I should, *carina*,” answered placid Rosalia, smiling down on her cousin’s perturbed face ; “but perhaps you won’t go away after all, so don’t worry yourself thinking about it.”

“Rosalia !” and Lina stopped still, looked very furious, and stamped her foot on the gravel path. “I cant make you out at all. You don’t seem half as sorry as I am at the idea of my going away. Ciccio cried about it last night, and you, who I thought loved me best, only smile and laugh about it. I don’t believe you do care for me.” So saying, Lina marched on quickly, too angry to *want* to cry, and yet finding it hard work to keep back the hot tears that *would* come into her eyes.

Rosalia ran after her, looking very sorry and perplexed. “I wish—I wish !” she said hesitatingly, then went on very fast : “Please don’t talk in

that unkind way, Lina! You ought to know how I love you. If I don't cry, it is only because I hope for the best, like papa always does, and can't believe yet that there is any fear of your going away."

Then Lina, who was easily consoled, began to recover her spirits, and soon it was time to leave this pleasant garden, with its groves, fountains, statues, and fantastic summer-houses; for Mrs. Gerard was in a fidget to go home to see if any telegram had arrived, and was secretly vexed with her brother-in-law for remaining so cheerful when she and her sister were so uneasy.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE STORM.

THIS uneasiness increased terribly as, hour by hour, three weary days dragged away, and still neither telegram nor letter came to tell the poor mother where to meet her child.

The weather, too, had now broken up. Inky masses of cloud obscured all the mountains, and no sooner did the tips of Monte Pellegrino, or Capo di Gallo, or Monte Acuto try to struggle through the mists, than fresh storm-clouds, blacker and inkier than their predecessors, came flocking down the blurred Oreto Valley from behind Monreale, and all was hidden as before. Torrents of rain poured steadily down and fierce gusts of wind were doing havoc among the orange and olive trees, howling through the streets, bursting open the ill-fastened

windows, and scattering in all directions the spray of that pretty fountain in the Piazza opposite Uncle Pasquale's house.

On the afternoon of the third of these boisterous days, the storm began to abate, its greatest violence seemed spent, the rain ceased, and faint gleams of sunshine and tiny scraps of blue sky were now and then to be seen between the drifting woolpacks.

Monte Pellegrino still wore his sable storm-robe with dark violet fringes, but there were such decided symptoms of improvement in the general aspect of things, that the little girls, weary of their long confinement to the house, clamoured to be allowed to go out and enjoy the fun of seeing the waves dash up along the Marina, instead of merely looking at them from the upper windows. They were both in what was their favourite play-room when it was impossible to go on the terrace—the pretty crimson antechamber with the four marble pillars, and I am afraid to say how often Lina had scrambled up those pillars during the past three days, or how many strings had cracked and buttons

flown off in consequence. But to-day she had exhausted all sources of amusement, and Uncle Pasquale, buried in an arm-chair near the window, had given many an amused glance from behind his newspaper at the impatient little figure so incessantly moving about the room.

"Yes! I know you are laughing at me, Uncle Pasquale!" she said, catching his eye in one of her sudden turns and giving a great sigh from the bottom of her heart; "but there is just nothing to do indoors, and it is so stupid, waiting for news that don't come. I have helped mamma as much as I could, and I have packed away all my toys and things, in case mamma should be able to take me after all. I'm sick and tired of reading and looking out of window. Alfonsa won't have us any more in the kitchen, and we are blown off our feet upon the terrace.

"Couldn't you take us out for a walk, please, uncle dear?" she went on, with a sudden transition from a grumbling to a coaxing voice.

"Yes! do, papa," echoed Rosalia. "I know you have nothing to do, and you must have finished

that paper. There would be time for a walk, wouldn't there, before——" and here she lowered her voice and whispered something in her father's ear.

"Yes, yes," he answered aloud, seeing Lina's bright, mouse eyes fixed inquisitively upon him directly Rosalia began to whisper.

"We'll go, then, children ; but mind you put on your oldest things, for no umbrella could be held up in this wind."

How Lina enjoyed the struggle across the Piazza in that fierce wind ! How nice it was to have her hair blown about and to have to hold her uncle's arm so very tightly in order not to be carried off her feet ! Once through the Felice gate and out on the Marina, it was better fun still, for every step was a battle ; and it was a comical sight to see the two girls, one on either side of Signor Altovito's sturdy figure, clinging to him for support, their petticoats flapping about his legs, labouring along with bent heads to meet the buffets of the spray-laden wind.

Heaps of seaweed and pebbles at the edge of the broad footway showed how far the sea had

overleapt the boundary wall, and it was still dashing furiously against the parapet, sending columns of foaming water high into the air. How beautiful the bay looked! what a variety of tints on its raging surface! To the right, Capo Zafferana and rugged Catalfano were only dimly visible through a mist of rain, but out of the gloom now came a scrap of rainbow, faint at first, but gradually brightening into brilliancy; and while the children were watching the increase of its arc as the sky cleared round about it, another bow appeared parallel with the first and a pale reflection of its vivid tints. On the left, the grand mass of Monte Pellegrino stood out majestically against the stormy sky, coloured black, and violet, and velvety olive-green; and between these two headlands was the bay, no more a tranquilly-glittering blue expanse, but a tossing waste of greyish water tinged near shore by all the hues of the double rainbow. The children shouted with glee as fountains of foaming spray, now flecked with pink, now with red, shot up into the air and came splashing past them and over

the wide pavement into the road. How often did they take fright and start away as the breakers thudded against the parapet ; and how often, emboldened by impunity, would they disregard the warning *thud* and receive a drenching shower right in their faces !

What child will not sympathise in their merriment when Uncle Pasquale, while still making fun of their dripping locks, was caught in his turn ? Then, all being wet alike, they went on, beyond the Marina, to where no wall kept back the dash of the waves along the paved way, slippery with sea-weed ; and here, I can tell you, they had to keep a sharp look-out, for every minute or two a great wave would come sweeping over their path.

Groups of bare-legged fishermen who, having nothing more to do now that their boats were hauled up high and dry out of reach of the sea, were lounging about talking and gesticulating, gave not a few astonished looks at the pranks of the two little girls.

"They are calling us mad foreigners, papa," said Rosalia, turning to her father with an air of offended dignity.

"What matters it, little one?" answered he good-humouredly, "they are not far wrong. No Sicilian-born mother would let her little girls go out on a day like this, much less scamper about in so wild a fashion, and indeed it is quite time for you to go home now."

Rosalia looked very disappointed. "Are you not going to take us down to the port?" she asked in an injured tone.

Her father shrugged his shoulders.

"Not at all likely in weather like this," he said to her rapidly in a low voice. "To-morrow, perhaps, if the wind falls."

"There is a steamer going out now, papa," said she.

"Out! yes, that is easy enough with this wind; but to come in—H—m."

"Look, look, uncle, how fast it goes!" cried Lina; "How glad I am mamma and I have not to go to-day! Think how dreadfully ill we should be!"

They were standing still now, watching the boat as she glided out of the harbour and, favoured by the wind, swiftly clove her way out into rough

water, and, pitching and rolling terribly, was soon almost out of sight.

"Papa, papa! I can see a steamer coming in! Do look, papa!" cried Rosalia all at once in an excited voice, and pointing seawards in another direction. Sure enough there was a great steamer slowly labouring towards the port in the teeth of the wind.

Uncle Pasquale and Rosalia seemed so deeply interested in the progress of this particular steamer, that Lina could not make it out at all.

"How ill everybody on board that boat must be!" she said compassionately. "And yet I don't pity them half so much as the others, for they are coming to dear Sicily, not leaving it!"

"That's right, Lina," said her uncle. "Let us hope that those on board share your sentiments and are willing to bear a little suffering, for the sake of seeing our glorious Palermo."

Now Rosalia began to fidget.

"Do let us walk faster, papa," she said; "the boat will be in harbour before we get there."

"No hurry, my child," answered he. "Most likely this is a Naples boat."

"No, no," cried sharp-eyed Lina, "I'm almost sure she is running up the French flag. I can just make out the colours. But why DO you want to know where she comes from?"

"Well, don't you think that in this stormy weather the passengers from France are more to be pitied than those from Naples?" inquired Uncle Pasquale, twirling his moustache and giving little Lina one of his merriest twinkles. "We'll go to the port and see this interesting vessel come in, for you were right about the flag, Lina, it *is* the French tricolor."

Lina was surprised to notice how her placid cousin hurried them on, and how excited she seemed. Uncle Pasquale, too, kept smiling to himself in the mysterious way that had so often lately puzzled the child.

Soon, out of breath with their quick walk in the wind, they were at the landing-place by the Molo; and there lay the big French steamer, its deck

crowded with passengers and already surrounded by a mob of small boats.

"Dear me! dear me!" exclaimed Uncle Pasquale, reading the name of the vessel, "why this is the *Monte Cristo*, and the captain is a particular friend of mine. I have a great mind to take a boat and go and pay him a visit. I wonder if you children would like to come?"

"Yes! yes!" cried Rosalia, but Lina began to laugh, and asked if the captain would not be too busy to speak to them just then.

"That's my affair," answered her uncle, briefly; and, before she knew where she was, Lina found herself hustled into a boat with the others and rapidly nearing the vessel. Another minute and they were up the side and standing on the deck. Once there, Uncle Pasquale seemed to have entirely forgotten his friend the captain, and walked about among the pale, weary passengers, looking attentively at each one. There was Rosalia too jumping about, and turning her head this way and that, and staring as though she really expected to



LINA DASHED PAST ALL THAT STOOD IN HER WAY.

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see some one she knew, and Lina was beginning to be astonished at her cousin's strange behaviour, when her attention was attracted by a little bustle at the head of the stairs from the ladies' cabin, caused by a tall, prim, elderly Englishman who was fussing about, giving orders in English, and superintending the movements of a fat German courier who was bringing up innumerable wraps, and bags, and air-cushions, and hatboxes, and a mighty bundle of sticks and umbrellas.

Surely Lina had seen somewhere the face of that Englishman ! It certainly looked familiar to her ! Now he was calling to some one below to make haste as the boat was ready ; there was a little more bustle, and a woman, apparently a maid, appeared, helping up the stairs a slight girlish figure enveloped in shawls and thickly veiled.

As this last personage stepped on deck, she threw back her veil from her thin young face, and looked towards the shore with glistening eager eyes. At the same instant, a joyful cry burst from Lina's lips, and, dashing past all who stood in her way, and

nearly upsetting the prim Englishman, in another moment she was clinging to the neck of her darling sister Emily, crying and laughing with delight and surprise.

"Dear little pet!" and "Darling Emily!" was all that either could say for the first few moments. Then Rosalia came shyly forward to welcome her new cousin, looking very pleased, but not at all surprised, and there was the prim English gentleman (no other than the formidable Uncle George) shaking hands with Uncle Pasquale and bending stiffly down to pat Lina's head and kiss her on the forehead (tickling her dreadfully with his big whiskers), ejaculating, "God bless me! So this is my youngest niece! Singularly like my poor brother! Dear me! dear me!"

It was not till they were all in the boat and close to the landing-place that Lina recovered sufficiently from her bewilderment of joy to ask a few questions.

"What a surprise for dear mamma! she cried, "Why, she has packed everything to be ready to

start. How *ever* is it that you are here? What a beautiful idea it was to come to us, instead of sending for mamma!"

"Dear me! dear me! So you really kept my secret, then?" said Mr. Gerard in his funny French to Uncle Pasquale.

"Yes, and so did this little girl of mine," answered the latter, twining his arm round Rosalia's waist; "but I can tell you, Mr. Gerard, I never in my life had so much difficulty in keeping a secret, and Rosalia very nearly let it all out two or three times. You tried hard enough, didn't you, Lina, to find out what was the wonderful mystery between Rosalia and myself?"

"What, Uncle Pasquale!" exclaimed Lina, opening her eyes very wide, and letting go her sister's hand to jump from her seat, "Do you mean to say you both knew Emily and Uncle George were coming, and never told mamma and me? What a shame! what a shame! How COULD you let mamma worry herself so dreadfully about going to meet them?"

"Sit down, Lina, or you'll upset the boat," answered her uncle; "and let us talk quietly about this atrocious crime. Don't you think poor mamma would have trembled at every gust of wind had she known that her Emily was on the sea?"

"Ye—es!" said Lina, pouting as much as her happiness would let her, "but you ought to have told us. It was *very* unkind not to——"

"Let me tell you something, little missy!" interrupted Mr. Gerard, who was aghast at Lina's impetuosity, and thankful that his charge, Emily, was of a quieter disposition. "If it had not been for Signor Altovito's pressing letter of invitation, which came to hand during your sister's illness, we should never have come to Sicily at all, so you should thank your worthy uncle instead of reproaching him."

"Do you remember the day you were so cross, because papa shut you out of the study?" whispered Rosalia, squeezing Lina's arm as they stepped on shore. "That was when the letter was written, and I had to translate it into English, as mamma was not in the secret."

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CHAPTER XVII.

A JOYFUL CHRISTMAS.

EVERY little girl blessed with a loving mamma can imagine poor Mrs. Gerard's thankful delight at this happy end to all her anxieties ; and yet if all my readers are of the same opinion as the curly-headed darling who is peeping over my shoulder while I write, I cannot finish this little story properly without saying something of that joyful meeting. When tired Emily, worn out by the long, rough passage, and still weak from her recent illness, was lifted out of the carriage, under the wide arched entrance of Uncle Pasquale's home, Lina would have rushed off in a frenzy of excitement to call her mother down ; but Signor Altovito bade her restrain herself, and made her keep by his side, as,

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slowly and carefully, he assisted Emily upstairs and into the antechamber. Through the curtains before the drawing-room door, they could hear Mrs. Gerard's low, sad voice, talking to Aunt Caroline.

"Now," he whispered to Lina, "run in and tell your mother I bring the best of tidings." Like an arrow from a bow, Lina sprang through the curtains, and gave her message in an oddly-shaking voice. Mrs. Gerard hurriedly came to the door. Uncle Pasquale gently pushed trembling, panting Emily into her mother's arms. There was a joyful cry from Aunt Caroline; happy Lina clung to her mother and sister in turn; Rosalia danced about the room; Uncle Pasquale kissed his wife, his sister-in-law, the three girls, then ran rapidly downstairs wiping his eyes; and rushing towards Mr. Gerard, who was again fussing over the courier, and the maid, and the loose luggage, threw both his arms round his neck, and kissed him Italian fashion on both cheeks, very much to that gentleman's surprise and consternation.

Nothing now was wanted to complete our Lina's happiness. Mr. Gerard settled down very comfortably at the big *Trinacria Hotel*, just round the corner, in which Signor Altovito had taken care to secure one of the best suites of rooms ; and for the first few days Emily was too weak to do anything but lie on a sofa, enjoying the sea breeze and being petted by everybody, in the terrace garden overhanging the Marina and the bay on which her windows opened.

Of course Mrs. Gerard, and Lina, and the Altovitos were constantly with her, and Uncle George proved to be by no means the ogre that Lina expected to find him. His old, unfounded prejudices against his sister-in-law (already weakened by his regard for her child) vanished altogether after a very short acquaintance ; he thought Uncle Pasquale a highly intelligent man, and Aunt Caroline the most charming of women. Then, as Emily regained her strength, all the delightful sight-seeing began again for her and Mr. Gerard's benefit, and many fascinating excursions were made

that it would take me too long to write about now. On these occasions, in spite of his father's threat to the contrary on Monte Pellegrino, little Ciccio always made one of the party, and, of course, he nearly always contrived to get into mischief. Emily was the only person who could keep him at all in order, for he had fallen desperately in love with his tall, blue-eyed cousin, and announced to every one, in most emphatic terms, his firm intention of making her his wife as soon as he should have reached the mature age of eighteen.

In this pleasant fashion, amid rides, and drives, and walks, and explorations of the various bone-caves near Palermo, when Mr. Gerard did great deeds with a geological hammer, weeks and months slipped happily past ; and by the time the growing heat warned Mrs. Gerard and Uncle George of the necessity of going north, it had been settled that the sisters should not again be separated, but that the villa in Florence should be given up, and that Mrs. Gerard should take charge of her brother-in-

law's household. "When Emily was taken ill, I soon found out, my dear madam, what a mistake I had made in assuming the sole care of her," said he, the day this important matter was decided.

Notwithstanding this arrangement, it was sad work for Lina to have to say good-bye to her beloved Sicilian cousins, to kind, merry Uncle Pasquale, and to dear Aunt Caroline, who was at last able to leave off her invalid habits and was stronger and better than she had been for years. How mournful were the farewell games on the dear terrace! The very rabbits looked melancholy, and Ciccio was so overcome with grief, that for two whole days he refrained from standing on his head. What amicable disputes took place between Rosalia and Lina over the many treasures of the *étagère*, each little girl wanting to bestow on the other the very things she liked best herself! Nothing relieved the pain of parting but Uncle Pasquale's formal promise to bring all the family over to England on a long, long visit the very next year.

“But never,” cried poor Lina, the tears streaming down her cheeks, as she and Emily stood on deck, waving a last farewell to four loving, tearful faces in the boat leaving the steamer’s side, “never anywhere shall we be so happy as we’ve been this winter in the Golden Shell.”

THE END.

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